

## TO THE READER

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1908







## *The Dead Have No Mouths*

DAVID STAVEBROOK walked out of a third-floor window in Victoria Street. Two months later Isidore Barholm stepped from a fifth-floor window in High Holborn, and then Joseph Markson trod empty air from the unrailed balcony of an empty house in Hanwell.

Coroners' juries recorded verdicts of suicide in all three cases, but Mr. Wigan, retired schoolmaster, who had attended each of the inquests in turn, declared forcibly that he did not believe it. He did not know then that on the person of each of the dead men the police had found a slip of rice paper bearing in Japanese the words, "The Dead Have No Mouths"; nor was he aware that the three men had been the object of the attentions of the Special Branch of Scotland Yard which deals with espionage and other such crimes against the State.

What was the connection between the Japanese proverb, the apparently voluntary deaths of at least three men and the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia? Who was the man with no back to his head?

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*The Dead  
Have No Mouths*

by  
*Charles Barry*

*London  
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All characters in this book are  
entirely fictitious and do not  
refer to any living persons.

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## CHAPTER ONE

# 死 人 = 口 ナ シ

DAVID STAVEBROOK WALKED OUT of a third floor window in Victoria Street. Lydia Benhurst, day dreaming at the window of her employer's office on the opposite side of the street, saw him do it and promptly fainted. She was thus spared the sight of what took place on the pavement edge below, where a large Daimler just then picking up speed pulled up with a jerk, but not before its bumpers had struck the falling man and its front wheels had passed over his body.

Mabel Fowler, unaware of the commotion below, administered first aid to her friend and fellow typist, for she had been trained to do such things as this at her local A.R.P. headquarters. Her efforts were successful and in reply to her anxious questioning Lydia Benhurst told what she had seen. Mabel passed the story on to Mr. Smith, the Chief Clerk in charge of Bolsover and Underhill's office which employed them. Mr. Smith telephoned the information to Scotland Yard and as a result Lydia told her story again to an amiable and considerate detective sergeant; she repeated it to a detective inspector and signed the statement he wrote out. A few days later she told her story again—this time on oath at the coroner's court. The coroner himself questioned her closely but Lydia stuck to her story. Nobody doubted its truth, even when later witnesses declared their inability to understand Stavebrook's action, and swore that he had been a normal cheerful



man, a consulting electrical engineer, with no financial or other worries, and fond of the good things of life.

The verdict was 'suicide,' with the added statement that there had been no evidence to show the state of David Stavebrook's mind at the time of his death. So it was that the evening papers of the 26th March recorded the news that a man had deliberately walked to his death through the third floor window of an office building.

There were other matters of greater importance than a mere suicide agitating the denizens of Fleet Street just then and the matter, never given much prominence, was forgotten—but not by everybody. An elderly man with a shiny bald head who had sat inconspicuously at the back of the court went away shaking his head and muttering to himself.

Then, two months later, on the 22nd May, Isidore Barholm stepped into empty air from a window on the fifth floor of Finlandia House in High Holborn. John Richard and Herbert Roddy, house painters working on a travelling cradle almost opposite, saw him do it, let themselves down to the street and helped to extricate his body from under the lorry which had not been able to pull up in time to avoid passing over it. They told their story to the traffic policeman; they repeated it to a detective inspector and swore to its truth in downright fashion at the coroner's court. Other witnesses testified to the happiness of Isidore Barholm's home life and to his financial stability, but Richard and Roddy gave their evidence with such conviction that the jury without further ado brought in a verdict of suicide, with the comment that no testimony was available to show the state of Barholm's mind.

The evening papers, busy with national and inter-



national crises, inaccurately and briefly announced that a man had thrown himself from a fifth-floor window, so there was nothing to cause any reader to draw a parallel between the death of David Stavebrook and Isidore Barholm. The elderly man with the shiny bald head who had sat at the back of the coroner's court did, however, draw that parallel as he left the building, shaking his head and muttering to himself.

Then, on the morning of the 14th July, passers-by on their way along Hanwell Broadway to their day's work were horrified to see the body of Joseph Markson crash down in front of a new block of flats then in course of construction and impale itself on the iron rod which was one of the supports of a temporary rope barrier round an open drain. Mary O'Riordan and Ethel Hosking, shop cleaners employed by the drapery firm of Allday and Summers, ran down from the third floor of the building opposite and vociferously informed all and sundry that they had seen the poor man walk "as straight as a ram-rod" through the unglazed French window of an unfinished flat on to an unrailed balcony, from which he had stepped "just as if he was going upstairs instead of down." They also repeated their tale to an ever-ascending hierarchy of C.I.D. officers and swore to its truth with emphatic gusto at the inquest, where Joseph Markston's private life was scrutinized and found to have been blameless and moderately happy, and where the stability and prosperity of his commercial enterprises gave no clue to the motive for his desperate act.

The coroner in his address to the jury recalled the similarity between the case before them and that of David Stavebrook, and made some philosophical remarks regarding the imitative tendencies of human beings even in the matter of suicide. He referred to the difficulty



of fathoming the minds of other people and so influenced the minds of the eight good men and true who composed the jury that they entered a verdict of suicide, adding, as the others had added, that no evidence had been forthcoming regarding the dead man's state of mind.

The elderly man with the shiny bald head who had listened to every word left the building after everyone else. He was not muttering this time nor was he shaking his head, but as he reached the outer door he clapped his soft felt hat on his head with force sufficient to render it shapeless, and hit the flagged floor with the ferrule of his stick.

"I don't believe it!" he said loudly and emphatically.

"That's what the fellow said when he saw the giraffe," a big clean-shaven man who was lighting a pipe at the foot of the steps said with a laugh.

The elderly man jumped with surprise.

"Eh? What? Why, it's Mr. Channing!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Mr. Wigan, it's me, all right," the big man replied. "What are you doing in these parts and what is it you don't believe?"

Mr. Wigan looked down the steps at the man whom he had addressed as Mr. Channing.

"I might retort," he replied precisely, "in Hibernian fashion by asking in turn what the eminent Mr. Channing is doing in these parts, but, I fear, in vain."

"Perhaps not, Mr. Wigan," the big man said simply.

Mr. Wigan stared again, and then ran down to street level.

"Ah! Ah!" he repeated. "Then I *was* right! That is it! I was right. Tell me, Mr. Channing."

Channing laughed.



"Not so fast, Mr. Wigan," he said. "Not so fast. We can't talk here, and besides, I want to hear your little tale before I can tell you anything."

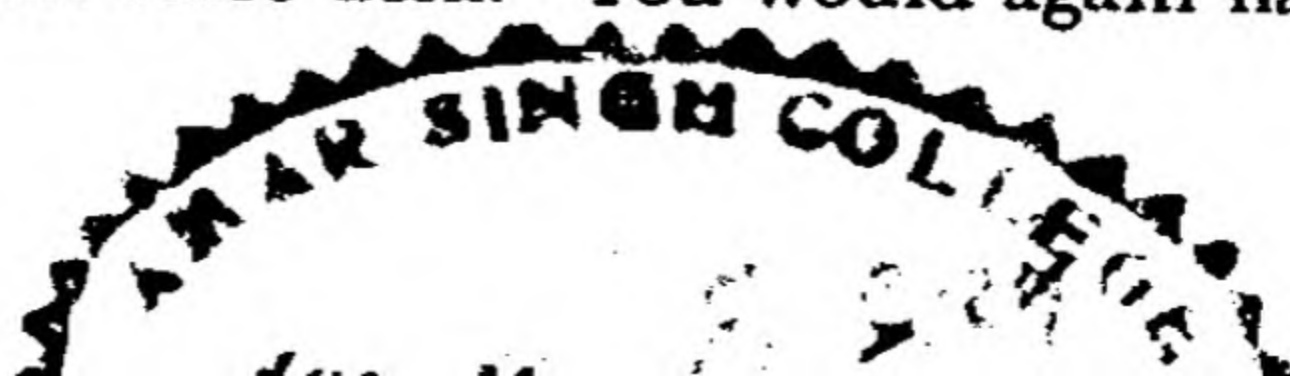
"Oh!" Mr. Wigan replied, as if water had been dashed in his face.

"Let's get along to Ealing Broadway," Channing suggested. "There's an A.B.C. just opposite the station where we can have a chat."

The two men were in complete contrast as they walked side by side to a trolley-bus stop. Mr. Wigan's stooping figure betokened not age, for he was no older than his erect companion, but rather the exercise of a sedentary occupation. At first glance, indeed, you would have taken him for a retired professor of some subject which had no connection with ordinary practical men or things, but you would have been wrong, for he had until lately been the very successful headmaster of one of London's largest county schools. His weak-looking, clean-shaven face belied the firmness of the man's character, for thousands of tough young men who had passed through his hands could—and would willingly—testify that Mr. Wigan's well-known tenacity of purpose was not just the stubbornness of the weak man in authority but rather the manifestation of an iron will thinly disguised under an amiable and smiling exterior.

"He's a nice old boy," one of his former pupils put it one day, "but God help the fellow who thinks he can fool him!"

Channing was Mr. Wigan's antithesis. On seeing him striding along towards the Uxbridge Road, erect and soldierly, taking one step to every two of Mr. Wigan's, you would have put him down at once as a man of 'the great open spaces'—certainly not as the habitual occupier of an office desk. You would again have been





wrong, for nearly all his waking hours were spent in a room ten feet by nine from which he directed the outdoor operations of others.

The two men did not speak as the trolley-bus rolled smoothly along towards Ealing Broadway. It was only when the waitress at the A.B.C. opposite the Great Western Station had served them that Channing referred to the object of their journey there.

"Well, Mr. Wigan," he said, "suppose you begin."

Mr. Wigan smiled over the rim of his coffee cup.

"Suppose I don't do anything of the sort, Mr. Channing," he replied softly. "What then?"

"Oh, then," Channing laughed, "I'd say you were trying to obtain a cup of—er—what is this?—coffee—under false pretences."

"That would, indeed, be serious," Mr. Wigan declared, "though as my favourite American film gangster would say, you couldn't make the charge stick."

"Perhaps not," Channing replied, and then in a different tone, "but seriously, why did you attend that inquest and certain others as well, and what is it you don't believe?"

Mr. Wigan pushed his cup away from him and leaned his elbows on the glass top of the table.

"I will tell you," he said. "On the 26th of last March I attended the inquest on the body of one David Stavebrook simply because I knew David Stavebrook. Knowing David Stavebrook I could not imagine him to be the sort of man who would take his own life, and I was thoroughly dissatisfied with the verdict."

Channing nodded.

"I see," he said, "and yet the evidence was quite clear. He deliberately walked out of a third floor window."



"Quite so," Mr. Wigan agreed. "Nevertheless, I knew that he had done nothing of the sort."

"Knew?"

"Well, not 'knew,' strictly speaking," Mr. Wigan said. "Perhaps 'felt' would be a better word."

"Was this feeling based on anything more substantial than your knowledge of the man?" Channing asked.

Mr. Wigan paused for a moment before replying.

"No, I suppose not," he said then, "unless you take into account a fact which was glossed over at that very unsatisfactory inquest, namely, that the window from which David Stavebrook stepped was that of an empty suite of offices with which he had no connection whatever."

"That was not glossed over," Channing contradicted, "for it was definitely established that Stavebrook had obtained the keys in person from the caretaker in order to view them as a prospective tenant."

"You certainly remember the details remarkably well," Mr. Wigan said significantly.

"I do," Channing replied. "Why did you go to the inquest on Isidore Barholm? Did you know him, too?"

"No, nor did I know Joseph Markson," Mr. Wigan answered, "but one of my former pupils, now a reporter, thought it worth while to tell me about their deaths. You see, Mr. Channing, you and I are not the only people who have been struck by the identity of the methods employed."

"You heard what the coroner said," Channing commented. "He was right. When somebody chooses a new way of committing suicide there are always a number of other poor fools ready to imitate him."

"Possibly," Mr. Wigan agreed, "but seriously, now,



don't you think that it is pushing the coincidence-idea too far to take it for granted that not only the method, but the other circumstances as well, can be duplicated—even triplicated by chance?"

"How? What do you mean?"

Mr. Wigan became the schoolmaster. Still keeping his elbows on the table he began to tick items off on his fingers.

"Firstly," he replied, "all three men walked out of a window into space. Remark that they did not *throw* themselves out—they *walked out*."

"Secondly, in all three cases the premises from which they took this extraordinary—er—step had no direct connection with the men concerned. In two cases they were empty office suites and in the third an empty unfinished building."

"Thirdly, in all three cases the financial and mental condition of the men was satisfactory, and they were not the type of men likely to commit suicide."

"Fourthly, in all three cases death was not merely caused by the fall."

"What do you mean?" Channing asked quickly. "The medical evidence——"

"The medical evidence was all right as far as it went," Mr. Wigan interrupted, "but did it occur to anybody to ask the surgeon whether Stavebrook would necessarily have been killed had he not been hit by a large Daimler car? Did the part played by the lorry in Barholm's death come into question?"

"There was neither car nor lorry in Markson's case," Channing reminded him.

"There was no need for either," Mr. Wigan retorted, "since he was impaled on a very conveniently placed spike."

"You are not suggesting," his companion said, "that the spike was placed there for the purpose?"

"I think," Mr. Wigan replied meekly, "that if the watchman in charge of the lamps is questioned, it will be found that that particular spike was moved about two feet from the spot where he had placed it originally. That, at any rate, is my explanation for the superfluous hole in a paving brick—a hole into which the spike will certainly fit."

"That 'fourthly' of yours," Channing admitted, "certainly never occurred to me."

"But," Mr. Wigan said, "the other three points did? Now, Mr. Channing, have I ever struck you as being a complete fool?"

Channing laughed.

"Far from it," he replied. "You are not even an incomplete one. Why?"

"Since you give me the credit for some intelligence," Mr. Wigan declared, "you will not be surprised if I draw certain conclusions from the fact that a highly placed official—a superintendent to be precise—of the Special Branch at New Scotland Yard has the details of two inquests on obscure people at his finger tips and attends the inquest on a third. Inquests are not much in his line, are they now, Mr. Channing?"

Superintendent Channing smiled at Mr. Wigan for fully a minute before speaking.

"Would it surprise you," he said, "to hear that I attended to-day's inquest because it was reported to me that you had attended the other two?"

Mr. Wigan smiled also, more benignly than the other had smiled, but he said nothing.

"Now," Channing went on, "since we understand



each other, Mr. Wigan, I will add a fifthly and a sixthly to your catalogue of coincidences."

He took out a wallet from his breast pocket and laid it on the table.

"Fifthly," he continued in imitation of Mr. Wigan, "the Special Branch was interested in certain activities of all three men: Stavebrook, Barholm and Markson."

He drew a slip of paper from the wallet.

"Sixthly," he resumed, "a slip of rice paper absolutely identical in each case was found on the persons of all three men."

"May I see?" Wigan asked.

"This is not one of the originals," Channing said, handing over the paper, "it is as exact a copy as I could make. It seems they use a brush to write these things; I used a fountain pen. I thought, knowing you were in Japan in your young days, it might interest you."

Mr. Wigan looked at the piece of paper, and what he saw was this:

死人 = 口ナシ

"Not a bad attempt at copying," he said. "Do you know what it means?"

"Oh, yes, one of our tame linguists translated it," Channing replied. "Can you read it?"

"Oh, yes, I can read it," Mr. Wigan declared. "It is a Japanese proverb: '*Shinin ni kuchi nashi*,' which means: 'The dead have no mouths.'"

"Exactly," the Special Branch Superintendent added. "Dead men tell no tales!"

## CHAPTER TWO

MR. WIGAN SAT LOOKING at the slip of paper for some minutes without saying a word. Channing watched him also in silence but finally spoke.

"Well?" he asked. "What do you think of it?"

"Before I answer that," the ex-headmaster replied, "I should like to know a little more."

"About what?"

"About various things," Mr. Wigan said. "For example, you say that the Special Branch has been taking an interest in the activities of these men. Now, did the inquiries you made give any information regarding contacts with Japan on the part of any of them?"

"No," Channing replied, "not exactly."

"What, precisely, does that mean?" Mr. Wigan asked. "Either you found that they had contacts with Japan, or that they hadn't—or do you mean that you found out nothing whatever about them?"

"Sorry," Channing laughed. "I should have remembered that you like answers to be clear and precise."

"Naturally," Mr. Wigan said.

"M'm, yes, I suppose it is natural," the Superintendent admitted. "Well, I was being deliberately a bit vague. That's my policeman's unwillingness to give any information outside my department, but there's no harm in telling you what I know. You helped us before, and——"

"Yes, yes," Mr. Wigan interrupted, "and, having nothing better to do, I may help you again—if you'll come to the point."



Channing chuckled into his empty cup.

"Before I do that," he said, "let me ask you something. You say you knew Stavebrook. What did you know about him?"

"Very little," Mr. Wigan replied. "As you are probably aware from your inquiries, he lived at Acton. A former colleague of mine also lives there in a flat in the same block as that occupied by Stavebrook. This colleague——"

"Brayburn by name," Channing interrupted with a smile.

"Ah! I see you *have* been looking into Stavebrook's affairs," Mr. Wigan went on. "In that case you are aware that Stavebrook, who seemed to be a lonely person, used to visit him from time to time and chat with him. It was at Brayburn's flat that I met Stavebrook. I found him an interesting talker, able to discourse on many subjects with intelligence, but neither Brayburn nor I ever discovered much about him beyond the fact that he had travelled a great deal. The last time I met him was in mid-March—on the 17th to be exact. We discussed a couple of Japanese prints—landscapes by Hiroshige—which Brayburn had picked up at a sale, and I amused myself by translating into English the Japanese text. It was when we had left my friend's flat and were going down the stairs that Stavebrook took from his notebook a little piece of rice paper on which were a few words in Japanese. He asked me if I could read it. I read it and translated it for him. The words were: '*Shinin ni kuchi nashi*,' and the meaning: 'The dead have no mouths.' Stavebrook did not seem to be particularly disturbed by what I told him and I left him quite cheerful. Two days later, however, he walked out of that window in Victoria



Street. Now, Mr. Channing, you understand why I attended his inquest."

"Then," Channing said, "you knew he had been threatened with death?"

"I knew nothing of the sort," Mr. Wigan declared, "and I do not know it now. If you showed me a phrase, say, in Russian or some equally unfamiliar language, which turned out to be a proverb in general currency, why should I take it for granted that you had received it, say, by post, or that, even if you had, it was sent as a threat? Don't forget, Stavebrook gave me no explanation."

"Yes, I see your point," Channing said. "Then, it was after you heard of the fellow's death that you thought of the possible significance of the proverb."

"No," Mr. Wigan replied. "I must confess I had forgotten all about it until you showed me your copy. But, Mr. Channing, you were going to tell me why your department was interested in Stavebrook and the others—or were you?"

"Was I? Well, yes, I can tell you this much. We strongly suspect that two of them were peddling information to a foreign Power. The third—well, he was not doing that."

"Japan?"

"No, not Japan," Channing replied. "The indications pointed rather to Germany."

"Indeed? That's interesting. Did you find out whether there was any contact between the three men?"

"There didn't appear to be. As far as we know none of them was aware of the existence of the others."

"I see," Mr. Wigan said. "The fact that two of them seemed to be 'peddling information,' as you put it—though the expression does not seem to fit the case—



taken together with the identical manner of their deaths, has suggested the idea to you that there is something which needs probing. It was not just the presence of an old retired schoolmaster at their inquests which brought you along. The very fact that somebody thought it worth while to report my actions to you tells me that you were already interested in these deaths."

Channing smiled.

"You are right, Mr. Wigan, as usual," he replied. "When Stavebrook died I didn't think anything of it, but when Barholm—er—walked out on us I sat up and took notice. It was when I was discussing the matter with some of my lads that Inspector Berry—you knew him as Sergeant Berry—mentioned that he had seen you. Then I really *was* interested. However, there was nothing much that I could do except set a few inquiries going. They led to nothing—or next to nothing. When Markson did the same as the other two I thought I'd look into the matter personally. When I saw you—well, I just wondered if your mind was running on the same lines as mine, so I waited for you."

Mr. Wigan nodded.

"Quite so," he said solemnly, "and now you are wasting time talking to me."

"Wasting time?" Channing echoed. "No, I don't think so. I wasn't wasting time during our talks last year about that Spanish Morocco case. In fact I couldn't have done anything without you."

Mr. Wigan murmured his thanks in a manner which Channing hardly knew how to take, for though he prided himself on a sense of humour as well as a knowledge of human nature, he never could satisfy himself that he understood what often lay behind Mr. Wigan's words.



"I'd like your opinion," the Superintendent went on, "about these three deaths."

"My opinion?" Mr. Wigan replied with an air of profound wisdom. "My opinion is that they are very mysterious."

Channing looked at his companion suspiciously and then decided to laugh.

"Oh, now you're laughing at me," he said. "No, I mean it, what do you think of it all—seriously?"

"Seriously, Mr. Channing," the ex-schoolmaster declared, "I think it is all very mysterious."

"That doesn't get us very far," the Superintendent murmured.

"No, indeed," Mr. Wigan agreed, "it does not advance us one step. My remark was simply meant to indicate the necessity for further inquiry on your part."

"I understand," Channing replied, "but my trouble is that murders—if these *are* murders—are not my line of country at all. The Special Branch has its own troubles and another department looks after that sort of thing. Now, after these verdicts I'd have a job persuading the Commissioner to put the C.I.D. on to this business unless I could satisfy him that there was something—er——"

"Mysterious?" Mr. Wigan prompted with a smile.

"Yes, dammit, mysterious," the Superintendent declared, "something which indicates the necessity for further inquiry, as you would say."

"Surely," Mr. Wigan said, "a bare recital of the facts should be sufficient. Suppose you were to say to the Commissioner: 'Sir, I have been making inquiries into the activities of three apparently unconnected individuals who seemed to be working for a foreign Power. Before I could complete these inquiries each

*See page 27*



of these men met his death in a similar manner at intervals of some few months. In each case an identical piece of paper on which was a Japanese proverb indicating that dead men's mouths are for ever shut was found among their personal effects. In each case also there is evidence that the men were normal human beings of a type which does not as a rule commit suicide, and that they had no financial or other worries. These facts seem to me to be so striking that mere coincidence is unlikely. Would you please have inquiries made in the matter. What would the Commisioner say?"

"That would depend on what he'd had for supper the night before," Channing replied. "If his liver was functioning badly he'd grin at me like the way a zoo tiger grins when the keeper brings him his daily joint, and he'd say: 'My dear Channing, one of these days you will be asking for an inquiry into a murder you heard of in your dreams.' Then he'd bark: 'Next business, please,' and that'd be that."

"An amiable gentleman, your Commissioner," Mr. Wigan said with one of his rare smiles. "What would he do if his cirrhosis were of a lighter shade?"

"If his—? Oh, yes! If he was in a good humour he'd take the trouble to tell me in great detail why he couldn't spare a man even to investigate the assassination of the Prime Minister, and he'd ask a lot of funny questions like: 'What was the medical evidence?' 'What was the evidence of the eye-witnesses?' 'What was the verdict of the coroner's jury?' and then he'd just pulverize me with: 'Have we solved the mystery in every case of a "wilful murder" verdict, that we must *look* for more work?' Now, Mr. Wigan, I ask you. What answer could I give him?"

"It has always struck me, Mr. Channing," the ex-



schoolmaster replied, "that you were particularly good at answering questions by asking others. Why not retort by asking, for example: 'What do we know of the antecedents of these three men?', or 'How many times must a particular form of violent death occur before we cease to believe in coincidence?', or again——"

"That's enough, Mr. Wigan," Channing interrupted, "I know the answers he'd give. He'd take a leaf out of my book and ask: 'What the blazes do we care about their antecedents?' 'Do we inquire into the antecedents of everybody who's been run down by a reckless driver?' 'Thousands of people die every year by walking into the rivers and lakes of the world; are we to assume murder because of that?'"

"Yes, I see that you would have some difficulty in convincing the good man," Mr. Wigan admitted, "though there are in turn answers to all those questions."

"I know that," Channing declared, "but I also know the answer to the one he'd ask next: 'Is this a debating society, Mr. Channing, or a department of the public service?' The answer is a very sour lemon, Mr. Wigan."

"Then," Mr. Wigan asked, "what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to ask a certain retired schoolmaster to help me," was the reply.

"Indeed? The retired schoolmaster will be flattered, I'm sure," Mr. Wigan said, "but in what way can he help?"

"Come along with me to my office and I'll tell you," the Superintendent answered promptly. "Where's the girl? I want my bill."

### CHAPTER THREE

**M**R. WIGAN HAD OFTEN been in Channing's office before. A year before the conversation just related he had had some difficulty in penetrating into Scotland House when a chance word overheard while waiting for a bus had prompted him to visit that part of Scotland Yard. He had been questioned by several people of progressively ascending rank until somebody had decided that his information was not the concern of the C.I.D. but of the Special Branch, and sent him through apparently interminable corridors and over a covered bridge to Superintendent Channing. The latter's reception of the news he had imparted had compensated the retired schoolmaster for the annoyance caused by the scarcely veiled scepticism of the other Yard men, for Mr. Wigan's information had been the piece necessary to complete a jigsaw problem which had been vexing the Superintendent for months. After that Mr. Wigan invariably entered the building by way of the entrance on the Embankment, for his shrewd suggestions on more than one subsequent occasion had made him a welcome visitor, while his unwillingness to interfere in matters which were not his personal concern was appreciated by Channing and those who worked with him.

The Superintendent, however, had very accurately guessed that this ex-headmaster, still at the height of his mental powers, did not enjoy the idleness of his days of retirement, and he often asked Mr. Wigan to give his opinion on some of the cases which were being investi-



gated. This Mr. Wigan was invariably pleased to give, but his greatest delight was when he was allowed to take an active part in an investigation by making actual inquiries in quarters where a Special Branch man would be suspect.

It had not occurred to him that the deaths of the three men who had apparently walked out from windows into empty space would interest the Superintendent or his department and he had, therefore, not called to see him on the matter, determined rather to pursue his own inquiries single-handed up to a point where he would have something concrete to place before the police authorities. He was, therefore, all the more pleased to see himself actually called upon to help without any prompting from himself, and diffident though he was he knew it to be possible and even probable that his collaboration would be of use to Channing.

The Superintendent on reaching his room immediately called for three files.

"I think," he said, "the best way is to begin at the beginning."

"An admirable principle," Mr. Wigan commented.

"The beginning," the Superintendent went on, "is, as far as I am concerned, Mr. Joseph Markson, so we'll start with him."

"Why not Stavebrook?" Mr. Wigan asked.

"Because," Channing replied, "this is the Special Branch—not the C.I.D."

"I see," said Mr. Wigan.

"You do? Good! I thought you would. Ah! Here are the files. Thanks, MacAdam."

The plain-clothes man placed the papers on the table and went out. Channing picked up the top file.

"Here we are," he went on, "Joseph Markson! Here



is his photograph. One of our fellows managed to snap him."

He passed the picture over to Mr. Wigan.

"H'm," the latter said, "coming down the Duke of York Steps!"

"Yes, Mr. Markson often came down the Duke of York Steps," Channing remarked significantly.

"You mean he used to visit the——"

"A certain consulate, shall we say?" the Superintendent interrupted. "Yes, at one time he was a fairly frequent visitor. However, let's get on with him. What, by the way, strikes you about Markson?"

"Nothing much," Mr. Wigan replied, "except that he has decidedly a Semitic look about him."

"That's what I thought," Channing said, "but I hear he's been buried according to the rites of the United Presbyterian Church. However, that means nothing. To my mind Markson had Jewish blood in him. That may be important."

"I agree."

"You do? Well, to continue: Markson was to all appearances the prosperous agent for various firms in Sweden, Holland, Germany, and Austria—as was! The first time we hear of him is two years ago when he took an office in Bush House. Where he came from we don't know. Actually he came under our notice more or less by chance. We were keeping a certain person under observation when we found that Markson was one of his contacts. There appeared to be no reason for their knowing each other, for the person we were tailing was purely and simply a member of the secret police of a certain foreign country. He's not in England now, thank goodness! Consequently, we kept one eye on Mr. Markson. You know what that means, I dare say. We



discovered then that he made journeys out of London to various places on the East Coast where inquisitive visitors are not encouraged. After each of these journeys he telephoned a certain number, and said much the same thing each time. Let me see. Where is it? Ah! Here we are! He said: 'E64 seven-thirty' or 'E64 six-fifteen' or some other hour. The reply was always delayed a bit as if somebody had gone to ask for instructions, and then it came—always the one word 'Yes,' and finish! That evening at the hour mentioned we were sure to see Mr. Joseph Markson going down the Duke of York Steps. Now we can't prevent people visiting foreigners, but——"

"Just a moment," Mr. Wigan interrupted, "was Markson an Englishman?"

"As far as we know," the Superintendent replied. "The Aliens Department have no record of him anyway."

"Thanks. Go on, please."

"Yes," Channing went on, "we can't prevent these visits. All we can do is watch. We watched, but that didn't get us anywhere. There was nothing incriminating in the man's correspondence and those journeys to the country were apparently quite innocent. I say 'apparently' because I don't believe they were innocent, but you realize that it isn't easy to tail a man in the country. However, about six months ago the journeys ceased, there were no more telephone messages and Mr. Markson didn't go near the Duke of York Steps any more. We kept on watching for a while, but the man was minding his export and import business and that was that. The next we heard of him was the other day, when he stepped from that balcony in Hanwell."

"And that," Mr. Wigan echoed, "is that?"



"Exactly," the Superintendent declared, "and now comes your friend Stavebrook—all right, Mr. Wigan, *not* your friend! There is this much in common between him and Markson: we don't know a blessed thing about him before he came to live in that flat in Acton. His name is, I suppose, English, but——"

"His accent decidedly American," Mr. Wigan interpolated.

"Don't you believe it," Channing said. "One of my lads who heard him speak said it was Canadian."

"Same thing," Mr. Wigan declared dogmatically.

"Don't let any Canadian hear you say so," the Superintendent laughed. "However, as I say, we know nothing of the man's antecedents, but from a conversation overheard in a pub we gathered that he came here from Canada. We're going into that. Anyhow, in addition to English he spoke fluent German. That's how we came across him. One of my inspectors heard him talking to another fellow who is well-known in the German colony here. He is supposed to be the warden of a sailor's home, but we have good reason to believe that he is a good deal more than that. He has been under our eye for a long time, and one curious thing about him is that, though he appears to take no part in any political affairs himself and never visits his Embassy or Consulate except on official occasions when everybody goes, the people with whom he gets friendly soon begin to act in a very suspicious manner. They start wandering about in the neighbourhood of dockyards and aerodromes and such places, and behaving in a way we don't like. Now Stavebrook did just that. His line was aerodromes."

"That's curious," Mr. Wigan said. "He told me at Brayburn's that he was very much interested in the



lighting of airports at night, and he seemed to know quite a lot about it."

"I have no doubt he did," Channing reflected dryly, "for he certainly paid a lot of attention to the subject. Besides he was an electrical engineer. We had to warn the Consolidated Airport Illumination Company to watch some of their younger technicians who were getting very pally with your—with Stavebrook. The C.A.I. have a few gadgets they don't want talked about, you see, and the Government agrees with them. But to get back to our subject. Stavebrook, like Markson, cost us a lot of time and energy, but there's some clever devil at work, and we could never find out whether he passed on information or not. If he did we don't know to this day how he did it. He paid no visits to the Duke of York Steps, nor anywhere else of particular significance. That was our trouble, you see. It's no crime to collect information; it's passing it on that's an offence.

"Well, that's how the position stood until last March. Then Stavebrook seemed to lose interest in aerodromes. He kept very much to himself—didn't go to his usual restaurants—visited only harmless people like your friend Brayburn—and he certainly communicated no official secrets by post, telegraph, telephone or even 'tell-a-woman.' Then one fine day he walked out of a window in Victoria Street."

While Channing turned over the leaves of the third file Mr. Wigan made a note on a piece of paper he took from a writing block which lay on the table. The Superintendent glanced at him but refrained from asking any question.

"Now we come to Barholm," he went on. "His case differs from the others. Isidore Barholm is a Polish Jew—or rather was—who came over here after the Great War

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and founded a tailoring and gown business. You know the sort of thing, I dare say: Cheap stuff for the provinces on practically a mass production scale. He became a naturalized Englishman three years ago. His business was prospering and he began a few months ago to open shops in country towns, where he sold the products of his London workshops on a sort of instalment system to the wives of working men, mechanics and that sort of thing. One day we got a letter from him saying that he wished to talk with a senior officer of the Special Branch. I saw him, and he told me a curious story. One of his new shops was in—well, we'll say it was near a certain military centre—and his customers were mainly the wives of non-commissioned and warrant officers both of the Army and Air Force. The manager of this shop was a young nephew of his who had come from Poland with him as a small boy and had grown up in England. He, too, was naturalized at the same time as his uncle. In fact he was entirely English in sentiment, and it was he who suggested the naturalization to Barholm. He is an intelligent young fellow, too, and when a woman came to his shop one day to put a proposition to him he listened. Then he promptly went to London to ask his uncle's advice. The uncle came to me. His story was that this woman, who spoke with a very slight foreign accent, proposed that young Lipovitch—that's his name—should try to get certain of his customers to buy above their means. These customers were actually named, and they were the wives of certain N.C.O.s and warrant officers who have the means of knowing very confidential things—one, for example, was the wife of the Chief Clerk at Tank headquarters. The object of getting them to buy more than they could afford was to run them into debt so that they would be willing to pay by



stealing documents from or through their husbands. Lipovitch was to be indemnified for any loss, and in addition was to be paid £10 for each woman involved. There was quite a lot of detail which doesn't matter now. What does matter is that before we could complete our arrangements for trapping the woman young Lipovitch was violently assaulted one night by three men in Army uniform, and had to be sent to hospital where, by the way, he still was when his uncle Isidore Barholm walked out of a window in High Holborn."

Channing closed the third file and looked at Mr. Wigan.

"Now," he said, "what do you think of that?"

"I think," Mr. Wigan replied, "that you need have no qualms whatever about putting the whole matter to the Commissioner. You have obviously there three of the most deliberate murders ever committed—impudent murders, I should add, which show either the greatest ignorance or the greatest contempt for the resources at the disposal of Scotland Yard."

"You think that?" Channing asked. "I'd like to hear how you came to that conclusion. Mind you, I agree with you entirely, but——"

"But you want me to marshal the arguments," Mr. Wigan interrupted. "Very well, I shall do so, but first of all I should like to ask a few questions. May I?"

"Certainly, Mr. Wigan," the Superintendent replied, "and I'll answer them if I can."

## CHAPTER FOUR

"THANK YOU," MR. WIGAN replied and looked at the notes he had taken while the Superintendent was speaking. "Now, unlike you, I shall begin with Stavebrook. My first question is: What do you know about the driver of the Daimler car which hit him as he fell?"

Channing turned over the pages of one of the files until he found the sheet he wanted.

"All we know is," he replied then, "that he was Richard Dearmer, of 180, Linden Gardens, Gunnersbury, of independent means, that he was driving a car which he had hired for the day with the intention of going to Bexhill. The garage people said that he was an experienced driver. One mechanic's expression was that he drove as though he had driven Daimlers all his life."

"Your people didn't inquire into him very closely, then?"

"Evidently not," the Superintendent said. "There appeared to be no reason for doing so. His presence in Victoria Street had every appearance of being a coincidence and, hang it all, a motorist doesn't expect to have to pull up for people who come down from the skies. He's got his job cut out for him avoiding pedestrians."

"Quite so," Mr. Wigan replied, "but I should be interested to know whether Mr. Dearmer still lives at 180, Linden Gardens."

"We can soon find that out," Channing declared and made a note.



"And now," Mr. Wigan went on, "what about the driver of the lorry which ran over Mr. Barholm?"

Channing consulted the relevant file.

"Herbert Manners," he read, "of 161, Catlin Street, S.E.16, carrier and owner of his own lorry. Was returning empty from a job when the incident occurred."

"I think he merits some attention also," Mr. Wigan declared. "Does he still live in Catlin Street—which, if I know my London, is somewhere near Rotherhithe? Is anything known of him prior to this incident? How long had he possessed the lorry? Where is the lorry now? In fact, where is Herbert Manners?"

"You're quite right, Mr. Wigan," the Superintendent said. "We ought to look into these things. I'll put one of my own lads on to it."

"It would also be a good idea," Mr. Wigan suggested, "to question the night watchman at Hanwell about that spike. Was it moved? If so, does he know who moved it?"

"I'll have that seen to," Channing promised. "Anything else?"

"Yes, it would be advisable to question more closely the porters of the office buildings in Victoria Street and High Holborn about how Stavebrook and Barholm came to be in the empty suites."

"In both cases," the Superintendent replied, "the men themselves asked for the keys to visit them in the capacity of prospective tenants."

"Surely," Mr. Wigan declared, "it is the custom for the porter to accompany such visitors."

"I dare say it is," Channing agreed after another look at the files, "but in each of these cases the porter was busy and the visitor himself told him not to bother."

"A curious coincidence, don't you think?"

"Now you mention it, yes."

"Did it not occur to you," Mr. Wigan then asked, "that it was strange of Mr. Barholm to look for an office in High Holborn? Surely he would prefer to have his office near his workshop!"

"Of course, it occurred to me," Channing replied. "In fact that was one of the points which set me thinking. As a matter of fact Barholm did have his offices at his workshop."

"Now about Barholm's nephew," Mr. Wigan continued. "Were the men who assaulted him ever found?"

Channing grimaced.

"No," he said, "the men wore the uniform of the Sherwood Foresters, a regiment which had left the garrison three weeks before. The local police came to the conclusion that the men had worn uniforms as a disguise and seemed to think that they would never be found."

"Curious," Mr. Wigan said.

"What is curious?" the Superintendent asked.

"The use of the uniforms," was the reply. "Especially the uniforms of a regiment no longer in the garrison. It suggests to me that they had been in use before the departure of the Sherwood Foresters."

"For no good purpose, I'll bet," Channing agreed.

"Now about Markson," the ex-schoolmaster pursued. "Why should he go to an empty unfinished house? Was he interested in houses? If so, why should he go there at such an hour in the morning?"

"He did, apparently, own a number of houses," the Superintendent replied, "but there is nothing to show that he was interested in that particular block of flats."



Why he should have gone there before eight o'clock is a mystery."

"Now, a last question," Mr. Wigan said, "and I've finished. Why, if you were not satisfied about those deaths, did you allow the inquests to take the direction they did?"

"I had nothing whatever to do with them," Channing told him. "The fact of the matter is that the local police in each case took the deaths for what they were, I suspect, supposed to be—suicide, and acted accordingly. From my point of view that was all to the good because somebody is probably thinking that we are all gulled. As I've often told you, Mr. Wigan, we catch our criminals through the mistakes they make. That may be the mistake which may hang a man—underrating Scotland Yard."

"That may be so," Mr. Wigan said, "but once you start inquiries I am very much afraid you will lose whatever advantage it gives you."

"Perhaps," Channing replied, "but in the meantime it will give us time to get something together in the way of information. No, my trouble is going to be from our own end—however, you were going to tell me what you think."

"No, I don't think I shall do that," Mr. Wigan declared, "but if I may I should like to make a few suggestions, that is, if I am not trespassing too much on your good nature."

"Don't worry about that side of it," the Superintendent said. "I've had your suggestions before and I've never regretted acting on them."

"That is pleasant to hear," the ex-schoolmaster replied, "so I can begin with a clear conscience. Now, in the first place I should in your place set on foot



inquiries into those two drivers. I have not yet indulged in any but the mildest gambles, but I am perfectly willing to wager a small sum that these men will not be found at the addresses they gave. Meanwhile I should advise you to compose a written memorandum to your Commissioner regarding these three deaths. Give the history of the victims as you have given it to me, but in greater detail perhaps. Then draw attention to those similarities and coincidences which are such a feature of the whole affair. For instance——”

Mr. Wigan here adopted his favourite method of enumerating the points on his fingers.

“In the first place,” he went on, “you might draw attention—on the principle of first things first—to the fact that all three men had come under the notice of your Special Branch; then, to the fact that they died while on premises where they did not seem to have an adequate reason for being; thirdly, that two of them—those who were apparently attempting to obtain secret information—died not long after they had ceased to communicate such information, and that they died by the same method in each case; then, point out that though they might all have been killed by the fall, their death was made doubly sure by, in two cases, being struck by a car or lorry, and in the third by the removal of a spiked rod to a spot directly underneath the place from which he fell. Draw attention to the murderous attack on young Lipovitch subsequent to his call upon his uncle for advice and to the death of his uncle after his visit to you. Don’t actually use the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* argument, but——”

“I certainly shall not do that,” Channing laughed, “at any rate, until I’d looked up a dictionary.”

“Don’t be modest,” Mr. Wigan smiled. “I repeat,



merely suggest the idea with as much subtlety as you can command. Then, if, as I suspect, you have lost trace of those two drivers, put that in as a makeweight. In a word, you must stress the coincidences to the point where it becomes ridiculous to insist that they are nothing more than coincidences."

"The idea being, I presume," the Superintendent said, "that the Commissioner will see for himself that further inquiry would be desirable?"

Mr. Wigan smiled.

"The idea being," he corrected, "that there will be written evidence of the fact that my friend Mr. Channing was right from the beginning, for if my guess is correct these three deaths are by no means the end of the business."

"What? You think there will be more killings?" Channing exclaimed.

"It is quite possible," Mr. Wigan replied, "but I was not thinking of that. From what you have told me I think it highly probable that there is actually going on at the present moment a big espionage drive. The political situation practically demands it. That, I take it, is what interests you most."

"It will interest more than me," the Superintendent declared. "The Military Intelligence people will also be anxious."

"Why not have a talk with them?" Mr. Wigan suggested. "And that brings me to another point. If you have other suspects under observation my advice would be to double your supervision, especially if any of them ceases apparently to provide his employers with information."

"Then, you think," Channing asked, "that these people were killed because——"



"Everything points," Mr. Wigan interrupted, "to the fact that Barholm was killed and Lipovitch almost killed because they allowed themselves to be caught communicating with you and with each other. The two others, Stavebrook and Markson, may have been killed because they knew too much, or simply because they had for some reason ceased to give information."

"I wonder," the Superintendent said, "why they stopped. Did they catch on that we suspected them?"

"If your men exercised their usual care," Mr. Wigan declared, "I don't think that was the reason."

"But you do think," Channing insisted, "that they were deliberately murdered?"

"Murder," the ex-schoolmaster said with his characteristic smile, "to be murder must be deliberate."

Channing gave a shrug of half-humorous impatience. "You know what I mean, Mr. Wigan," he said. "We can't all be as strict as you with the use of words."

"If you mean: were the deaths due to murder, to suicide or to accident, then I have no hesitation in saying 'murder.' "

"That's good enough for me," the Superintendent declared. He closed the files on the desk before him.

"You suggested," Mr. Wigan said diffidently, seeing that Channing apparently considered their conversation at an end, "that I might be of some help to you. In what way can I be of assistance?"

"Good Lord, Mr. Wigan," the Superintendent replied, "you *have* helped already."

"Oh, I thought you might want me to make some inquiries," Mr. Wigan said with a touch of disappointment.

"Well, I don't exactly see how—er—what kind of inquiries you could——"



"May I suggest," Mr. Wigan interrupted eagerly, "that to begin with, at any rate, I should have interviews with one or two people who had contact with Stavebrook—the person who cleaned his rooms, for instance, and the porter at his block of flats."

Channing thought for a moment and then nodded.

"All right," he said, "that may be a good idea, especially if you talk to those people—not like a person inquiring officially but like a friend of the dead man. Yes, talk to those people."

"Thank you," Mr. Wigan said and rose to go.

On leaving Scotland House he turned into the entrance to Westminster District Railway Station and bought a ticket for Acton Town. On the platform he watched a Richmond train come in and go out while people pushed past him. Suddenly an idea came to him and as was his custom he put his hand in his pocket in search of an envelope or some such paper on which to jot down a note. He pulled out a small slip of very thin paper and looked at it. He made no note, but turned and made his way back to Scotland House. Channing was still in his room when Mr. Wigan reached it.

"Hello!" he said. "Thought of something, Mr. Wigan?"

"I—er—don't want to appear as an alarmist, Mr. Channing," he said, "but I should like to tell you that if on any day I do not see you or telephone to you I should like you to send somebody to my house. There they will find in a tobacco jar on the mantelpiece a note saying where I intended to go."

Channing stared.

"Why?" he asked. "What do you mean, Mr. Wigan?"

Mr. Wigan placed the slip of thin paper on the desk.

"I have just found that in my pocket," he said. "On the Underground platform."

The Superintendent looked at the paper and saw:

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"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed. "The dead have no mouths! That means somebody knows. Look here, Mr. Wigan, you'll have to have police protection. We can't have you——"

"No, thank you, Mr. Channing," Mr. Wigan broke in. "I want no police protection. In fact, I should resent it very much. That little warning is just what I wanted to keep me in good form. I was beginning to vegetate. Mr. Channing, now we shall see some fun."

"You've got a funny idea of fun," the Superintendent said, "but as you wish. 'Phone me every morning and evening, though, say at 9 a.m. and at 6.30 p.m. Right?"

"Right!" Mr. Wigan agreed. "I think I'm going to enjoy this."

As he walked out again the Superintendent stared after him.

"I believe he is," he said to himself. "The man actually got ten years younger in ten minutes."

Channing had settled down again to the work awaiting him on his desk when the door opened again and Mr. Wigan's head appeared round the leaf.

"That's another point for your Commissioner," the ex-schoolmaster said, "but have an answer ready when he asks why the devil Japanese and not the King's English—or German?"

Then he was gone.



## CHAPTER FIVE

SUPERINTENDENT CHANNING HAD A talk with his immediate superior, the Assistant Commissioner in charge of the Special Branch, as a result of which that official was won over to his point of view.

"The point is, however," Sir George Goodman concluded, "that these murders—granted that they are murders—are merely incidental to the espionage question, that is, as far as we of this Branch are concerned, and it's more than probable that if we get the spies we get the murderers. Getting the spies is our job; getting murderers is the C.I.D.'s job, so it would seem that the two departments ought to work in collaboration."

He paused for a few seconds and smiled.

"And yet," he went on, "I would like to put it across the C.I.D. and do the job on our own."

"But, sir, we haven't got the men," Channing objected. "What with all this I.R.A. trouble and the general situation politically speaking, our chaps are nearly dead on their feet. Besides, supposing we did catch these killers, they'd be tried for murder—not espionage. In fact, I think it would be wise not to mention espionage at all if we can avoid it."

"I don't see how we can avoid it," the Chief Constable declared. "It would come into any discussion of motive."

"That's true," the Superintendent agreed, "but there's another side to be considered. We are not equipped like the C.I.D. for a murder investigation. Most of our lads would hardly know how to set about it."

"Just," Sir George added, "as the C.I.D. would not know how to set about our work."

"Well, I don't know about that," Channing demurred, "but my point is that we ought to ask the Commissioner to put the C.I.D. on the job."

"I am inclined rather," his chief said, "to think that it's a job for close collaboration between them, ourselves and the M.I. people. Look here! Write your memo and give it to me. I'll go with it and have a talk with the Deputy Assistant Commissioner C. Damn it, he'll have to do something. My proposal will be that he should attach an inspector to us for the murder inquiries, to work directly under you. If he is pig-headed about it, as he may be, seeing that his people are not considering these deaths as anything but suicide, then we'll have a big pow-pow with the A.C. and if necessary with the Commissioner himself. How's that?"

"That is the best we can do, I think, sir," Channing agreed. "Meanwhile I will have a talk with the Intelligence people and start our boys on the inquiries old Wigan suggested."

"Keep in close touch with the old boy," Sir George advised callously. "He may turn out very useful as bait. He's obviously been spotted. You say he doesn't seem to mind, eh?"

"He's enjoying it, sir," Channing laughed. "He's having the thrill of his life."

"That's nothing to what he'll have when he walks out of a window," was the unfeeling comment of Sir George Goodman, as he dismissed the matter.

"I'm going to do my best to prevent that," Channing declared.

"Well, I hope you succeed," his chief said. "The others did it under our noses."



"Only when we had taken our watches off," the Superintendent replied with a tinge of protest in his tone.

"Yes, or before you put them on," Sir George added, "as in Barholm's case."

Channing thought that it was time to leave. He rose to his feet.

"Then," he said, "I leave matters in your hands, sir. I must go and have a talk with L.2 and M.I.5."

"Yes," Goodman replied. "I'll see to things. In the meantime get as quick a move on as you can from our end."

The Superintendent, as he returned to his room at the other end of the corridor, could not help reflecting how easy it was to talk of "getting a move on" and how difficult to set a cumbrous machine in motion. Nevertheless, five minutes later he had set on foot inquiries regarding the whereabouts of the drivers of the lorry and car concerned in the deaths of Stavebrook and Barholm. Another subordinate was detailed to interview the night watchman at Hanwell, regarding the moving of the barrier support. Then the Superintendent paid a visit to L.2, which is the department of the Metropolitan Police which deals with the registration of aliens. Having obtained from his colleague there the promise to search certain records he left the building and crossed the river to a building in which were housed, besides various commercial offices, certain other offices in charge of men whose appearance was more military than commercial.

Meanwhile, Mr. Wigan, though apparently unperturbed by the receipt of the warning message, had changed his itinerary, and half an hour after his departure from Scotland House he was in the consulting



room of an eminent specialist, a man of roughly his own age with the appearance of a plethoric farmer.

"Hello, Wiggy," the physician greeted him. "Surely you don't require my enlightened aid. Sit down anyhow."

"I wouldn't take your advice if you paid me to do so, Croker," Mr. Wigan replied, "but you have your uses and I want some information."

The two were old friends who, though they seldom met, enjoyed each other's company.

"Carry on, Wiggy. I'll answer any questions I can."

"Good," Mr. Wigan said. "All I want to know is whether medical science knows of any method by which a man can be induced, apparently of his own free will, to walk from a height into empty space."

The physician pursed his lips.

"H'm!" he replied after a short pause, "that's not an easy one, Wiggy. It's one of those questions one has to answer by saying: 'It all depends.' You know, of course, that there is such a thing as hypnotic suggestion, but frankly, old chap, it's a thing about which very little is known. If, for example, you hypnotize a man there's no telling what form the hypnosis will take. In one man it may take the form of catalepsy: in another he may be in such a state that he will obey implicitly the will or suggestion of the hypnotist."

"Suppose," Mr. Wigan said, "he is in the latter state. Could he then be induced to—well—to walk out of a third floor window?"

"Again," the medical man replied, "I must answer: it all depends. It is, as far as I know, still a moot point whether a person in the hypnotic state can be made to do things which run counter to his moral consciousness."



Some authorities claim that he can, but others think not. I think with these. If, in the case you suppose, the subject is one to whom the idea of suicide is repugnant, then I don't believe he could be made to throw himself from a third floor window."

"I did not say 'throw himself,' " Mr. Wigan reminded his friend. "I said, '*walk* out of a third floor window.' "

The physician considered for a moment.

"Then," he said, "I think it may be just possible."

"How?"

"By implanting in the subject's mind that he was walking in the ordinary way from one place to another and giving to that walk a perfectly logical object."

"You mean," Mr. Wigan inquired, "that even his subconscious mind—or whatever you like to call it—would be unaware that he was likely to fall to the ground."

"Quite so," the doctor replied, "but don't forget that it's not so easy as people think to hypnotize a healthy, normal human being."

"That is what I have always thought," the ex-schoolmaster said, "and that is why I have another question for you. Is there any drug which can be administered which would have the same effect as hypnotism?"

"I don't know of any," the doctor answered, "but there certainly are drugs which would predispose one to hypnotic influence. That is to say, they would make the subject more easily influenced. In fact, some of the new drugs are uncanny in that way. You have heard of the thing the popular Press calls the 'truth drug'? Well, there are drugs of that type which might have the effect I've mentioned. Indeed, I read something the other day about the researches of that Japanese—Yamasari—who was killed in a street accident in Berlin the other day, where it was claimed that he had dis-



covered some preparation which was an anæsthetic and had at the same time the property of rendering the subject amenable to suggestion. I'll look up the paper for you if you are interested, but I personally am always very slow to accept such claims without a lot of evidence."

"If you would look the thing up," Mr. Wigan said, "I should be very grateful. I should also like to know something more of this Japanese you mention—Yama—what is it?"

"Yamasari," the doctor supplied. "Oh, he is fairly well known. He did a lot of very useful work at the Rockefeller Institute, but of late he had worked on his own. Pity he was killed like that."

"What happened?" Mr. Wigan asked. "You said something about a street accident."

"Yes, it seems he walked slap into a motor-coach in Berlin and was killed on the spot." The doctor laughed. "In fact, you might think he had taken a dose of his own medicine and then acted like your suppositious fellow walking out of the third floor window."

Mr. Wigan was not amused.

"Was it established that it was an accident?" he asked anxiously.

His friend stared at him.

"Look here, Wiggy," he asked, "what are you getting at? All these questions are not just for the fun of the thing. I know! You're back at your old tricks. Detecting, that's what you're doing, just like you did that time in Cambridge when all the Trinity doornobs disappeared. Lord! That's a long time ago."

"Yes, it is a long time ago," Mr. Wigan agreed, ignoring the rest of the doctor's speech. "Well, thanks,



Crocker. I mustn't keep you. You're a busy man these days."

Mr. Wigan rose and held out his hand.

"You old fraud!" the doctor laughed as he shook it. "Oh, well, keep it to yourself, but one day I'm coming along to hear the story. That's my fee."

"You will be paid," Mr. Wigan promised, "if I am alive."

"You'll be alive long after I'm under the sod," the other laughed. "Well, good-bye, Wiggy. Come in some evening for a jaw."

Mr. Wigan left Wimpole Street and had a modest lunch in a public-house near by. Then he used the ticket he had taken earlier for Acton. There the porter of the block of flats who was sunning himself at the main entrance greeted him as an old acquaintance.

"I'm afraid, sir," he said then, "Mr. Brayburn is out. He told me he wouldn't be back till late."

"I didn't come to see Mr. Brayburn," Mr. Wigan told him, "I came to see you, Widdop."

"Me, sir?" Widdop exclaimed, obviously surprised.

"Yes," Mr. Wigan replied. "You. I wanted to ask you something about Mr. Stavebrook."

"What? Him that used to live in Number 29?"

"Yes."

"Funny, that is," the porter said. "When he was alive he never had a visitor, and now he's dead, poor man, there's people asking about him all the time."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir," the man went on, "he was hardly cold in his grave when two gentlemen came here—foreigners they were, though one of 'em did talk like Mr. Stavebrook himself, a bit American, you know. Then about a month ago a funny little chap, Chinaman or Jap, I'd say



he was, came and wanted to get into his flat. Offered me a quid, he did, if I'd let him. 'Course I didn't let 'im. Then at the end of the quarter—Mr. Stavebrook's rent was paid up to the 29th of June—a van came and took his furniture away. Oh, it was all O.K. The furniture blokes had a letter from the secretary of the company authorizing them to move the things. Then, only the other day—Sat'day it was—just as I was knocking off, another chap came—oh, a regular foreigner he was!—asked to see Mr. Stavebrook, but he didn't say it like that; it was more like 'Staffbricks' if you ask me, but I knew who he meant. Funny, that was! When I told him Mr. Stavebrook was dead he looked like as if I'd hit him. Then he sort of recovered an' asked me what 'e died of. I told him he'd throwed himself from a winder, an' then I thought he'd hit me. He said he didn't believe it, so I went in an' got the newspaper with the account of the inquest. I kept it 'cause of my name being in it. The bloke reads it and then goes away muttering to himself in some foreign lingo. An' now, there's you, sir, asking about Mr. Stavebrook. What was it you wanted to know, sir?"

Mr. Wigan smiled.

"I think," he replied, "you have already told me nearly all I wanted to know, but I should like to ask you for a few particulars about all these people who have been making these inquiries."

The porter looked doubtfully at the ex-schoolmaster, but then shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he said, "seeing as you're a friend of Mr. Brayburn, sir, I suppose it's all right. I'll tell you what I can."

"Thanks," Mr. Wigan replied, "by doing so you may be helping me very much."



"What was it you wanted to know, sir?"

"First of all, about the first two visitors. Did they come together?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did they want?"

"One of them," the porter replied, "said he was a reporter for an American paper—wanted to know interestin' bits about Mr. Stavebrook's life. I told him Mr. Stavebrook kept 'imself to 'imself, and I knew nothing about him. Cheek, I thought, asking questions like that. Then the other one said something about Mr. Stavebrook's flat being vacant now. Couldn't he look over it as he might like to take it over. I said, no, he couldn't, 'cause I had no instructions, and Mr. Stavebrook had paid his rent to the end of the quarter anyway. Then he asked if there was any other flats vacant. I didn't like the look of the man, sir, and I said 'no,' though there was one on the fifth floor. Then 'e asked who was the landlord, and I told him: The Western Counties Properties Corporation."

"I see. Now about the removal of the furniture. You say the removal men had a letter from the secretary of the company?"

"Yes, sir. Typed on the company's paper and all."

"H'm! Did you notice what company was doing the removal?" Mr. Wigan asked.

"No, sir, it was a plain van, like they say in the advertisements," Widdop replied.

"You never thought of asking the secretary of the company whether he really did give this letter?"

The porter stared.

"Do you mean, sir, it was a fake?" he asked. "Crikey, no, sir, I never thought of asking."

"Did you keep the letter?"

"Did I? Let me think, sir. No, sir. Now you mention it, the van driver took it back."

Mr. Wigan shook his head from side to side.

"Very careless of you, Widdop," he said. "That letter would have been your only justification of your action were it ever questioned."

"You're right, sir," Widdop declared. "Don't tell me the—Lord, sir, how was I to know?"



## CHAPTER SIX

MR. WIGAN LEFT THE block of flats half an hour later, the possessor apparently of very little more information than he had had when he came, but he looked thoroughly satisfied. His total haul had been the facts already recorded, together with a very vague description of the visitors who had inquired regarding Stavebrook and the address of a lady with the curious name of Emma Bible, who used to 'do for' David Stavebrook. As Mrs. Bible lived in Shepherd's Bush Mr. Wigan strolled in that direction, ignoring the trolley-buses which overtook him every few seconds. As he elbowed his way along the crowded Uxbridge Road with its shops and market, nobody observing this elderly ex-pedagogue would have taken him for a man under sentence of death, for as such he understood the Japanese proverb. A faint smile played around his lips as if his thoughts were pleasant and he anticipated nothing but happiness ahead.

He reached the shabby side street where the charwoman lived and saw from the numbers of the houses that he had the entire length of the thoroughfare to cover before reaching the dwelling-place of Mrs. Bible. It was a dreary walk amid dust and flying pieces of torn newspaper and cigarette cartons, but Mr. Wigan did not seem to mind. At last he came within a few doors of the house whose number had been given him by the porter Widdop. He was calculating that three doors lay between him and the charlady's abode when he saw issuing from the door he had marked down a squat fair-haired man in nondescript grey clothes who



turned away in the opposite direction. Mr. Wigan halted. "A man with no back to his head," Widdop had described the man who had called himself a reporter. Mr. Wigan hurried on again, and at the door of Mrs. Bible's house wondered whether he should follow the man ahead. His mind was made up for him by a sudden scream from the house—the frightened scream of a child—followed by still more terrified cries of "Mummy! Mummy! Mummy!"

Mr. Wigan tried the door. It was locked. He ran to the house next door, and knocked insistently. After what seemed an age a tousled youth opened up.

"'Erel 'Erel 'Erel!" he growled. "No need to knock the plyce dahn! What d'ye want?"

"There's something wrong next door," Mr. Wigan said, hurriedly. "Come and help me get in."

"You barmy?" the youth asked unconcernedly. "That kid, I s'pose! Garn! It's always yellin'."

"Don't be silly, you young ass," Mr. Wigan shouted. "This is a police business. If you don't help there'll be trouble."

"Sez you!" was the elegant reply as the fellow made to close the door in his face. Mr. Wigan's unobtrusive foot prevented the completion of the movement.

"Damn you, sir!" the ex-schoolmaster shouted. "Are you capable of understanding English? The woman next door has been murdered."

He had not taught Londoners for thirty years without knowing the morbid psychological effect of the word 'murder.' The door was opened wide and a woman pushed forward.

"Murder!" she yelled. "'Erb, get the p'leece!"

"It would be more to the point if he would help me break down the door," Mr. Wigan declared, looking



anxiously down the street where the back of the fair-haired man had almost disappeared from view, "or follow that man—if he has the energy."

"Wot man?" the youth asked.

"Oh, come on, man, and——"

Before he could finish the sentence the door of the neighbouring house opened and a little boy clad only in a shirt ran out, his hands covered with blood. "Oh! Mrs. 'Awkins!" he screamed, seeing the woman beside Mr. Wigan, "Mummy's dead! The man 'it 'er. She's all bleedin'. Look!"

"Look after the child," Mr. Wigan said to the woman, and then to the youth: "Get a policeman, you, if you're awake."

The fellow was apparently awake, for he dashed off shouting: "Police!" The inevitable happened. Every door in the street was at once opened and disgorged men and women in various stages of undress. Mr. Wigan ignored them all and ran in next door. He shut the door behind him, and made for what was obviously a kitchen. A kettle was boiling, filling the place with steam. Mr. Wigan turned the gas off. On the floor, half across the threshold of the scullery, lay a woman. Mr. Wigan saw at once that she was not dead, for a low moan came from her lips. He took one look at her and then went back to the front door round which the entire population of the neighbourhood was milling. He opened the door.

"There he is!" someone shouted. "That's the murderer!"

Mr. Wigan looked around and pointed to an elderly man of the artisan type who was calmly looking on.

"Come in here," he said.

The man walked forward without a word while the cries died down.

"Who's the most level-headed woman in that lot?" Mr. Wigan asked.

"There isn't one," the man replied contemptuously in an accent which reeked of the Clyde. Then he turned to one of the crowd. "Go and get Alice," he said.

"That's my daughter," he said. "She's a cool one. What's the trouble, sir?"

"Come inside," Mr. Wigan directed. "Your daughter can knock when she comes. But first of all send somebody for a doctor."

"Go and get Doctor Dinwiddie!" the man shouted to the crowd and waited to see that somebody obeyed.

"Come on," Wigan said. "Help me get this poor woman on to a couch."

The workman followed Mr. Wigan into the kitchen. On seeing the woman on the floor he said simply:

"She has a sofa in the front room."

"Right! Let's get her there. You take the shoulders and——"

"I'll take the whole of her," was the calm reply. "She's only a wee bit of a thing, poor lassie."

With a little effort as if he were raising an infant from its cradle the Scot lifted the woman from the floor and walked to the front room. There was a knock at the front door and Mr. Wigan went to open it. A fresh-faced girl in her late twenties stood there, calm and neat.

"I'm wanted here, I hear," she said simply.

"You are. Come in," Mr. Wigan replied just as simply.

"Get a clean cloth and some warm water. The kettle is probably not empty," he directed then, "and come into the front room."

Without a word she went to obey. Mr. Wigan went



into the front room where the man was leaning over Mrs. Bible.

"The poor lass is no' deid," he said on seeing Mr. Wigan. "She's had a terrible clout on the side o' the heid and some swine's hit her in the eye forbye. And look, sir, she had money in her fist. Has somebody tried to rob her?"

"Go to the kitchen, you men," came the order in a girl's voice from the door of the room, "I'll tend to her."

The men obeyed. Mr. Wigan smiled at the man.

"You and your daughter are people after my own heart," he said. "Mr.——"

"Sanders is my name," the man told him, "and yours, sir?"

"Wigan."

"Wigan!" Sanders repeated. "Wigan. I once heard of a man called Wigan—a schoolmaster he was. Got a brother of mine out of a bit of trouble in Japan."

"Goodness gracious!" Mr. Wigan exclaimed. "Are you a brother of Alec Sanders—third engineer on the *Stack Skerry*?"

"And you're the same Mr. Wigan. Losh! It's a sma' wor-rld! But Alec's a chief engineer noo, due to retire soon. Thanks to you he's not rottin' in a Japanese prison. Well! Well! Well! Man, that's every bit o' thir-rty year ago."

"And a bit over."

"Well! Well! Well!" Sanders repeated again. "I'm proud to meet ye, Mr. Wigan, though I'll admit I was keepin' my eye on ye a while ago. But, tell me, sir, what has been happening here? Who would be waitin' to mur-rder a har-rd-wor-rkin' wee body like Mrs. Bible?"

"I'm afraid it's a complicated story, Mr. Sanders," Mr.

Wigan replied, "but it amounts to this: She has got mixed up in matters she knows nothing about, and——"

He got no further, for there was an authoritative knock at the door. Sanders went to open and admitted a policeman and a man in civilian clothes.

"In the front room, Doctor Dinwiddie," he said to the latter. "My Alice is there."

"Good!" the doctor said, and went into the little parlour.

"Come to the kitchen," Sanders said to the policeman.

The policeman was young and apparently intelligent. He did not ask: "What's all this?" but followed Sanders. He looked inquiringly at Mr. Wigan but still said nothing.

"My name is Wigan," the owner of the name introduced himself. "Full information about me is to be had from Mr. Channing, superintendent at Scotland Yard."

"Thank you, sir," the policeman said.

"My name is Sanders," the Scot declared in his turn. This time the policeman smiled.

"I know you, Mr. Sanders," he said. "Now, who can tell me what's been happening here?"

"Not me," Sanders replied. "I leave that to Mr. Wigan."

"And I," said Mr. Wigan, "can only guess. However, I'll tell you what I know."

He did so, suppressing, however, the fact that he had been about to visit Mrs. Bible and refraining from speculation regarding the reason for the attack on the woman. He gave a description of the man he had seen leaving the house and expressed his candid opinion concerning 'Erb, the youth next door.

"I know him, sir," the constable said, "an idle good-for-nothing."



"He's all o' that," Sanders declared forcibly, "and maybe a lot worse."

Doctor Dinwiddie came into the kitchen while they were still talking. The three men looked at him inquiringly.

"She'll get over it," the doctor said in an accent only slightly less pronounced than that of Sanders, "but we must get her to hospital."

"She can't be questioned, then?" the constable asked.

"Not for days," Doctor Dinwiddie declared emphatically. "She has verra serious concussion, and Lord knows how it'll take her. Will you see about the ambulance, Constable?"

"Yes, sir. I believe there's a child," the policeman said. "I'd better——"

"My Alice will look after the bairn," Sanders declared.

"Then he'll be well looked after," the doctor affirmed.

"Run along, man, and see about that ambulance. We'll stay here till you get back."

Doctor Dinwiddie had no curiosity regarding what had happened, and he returned to his patient leaving Mr. Wigan and Sanders together.

"Will ye excuse an impairtinent question, Mr. Wigan?" the latter asked.

"Very probably," Mr. Wigan replied. "What is it?"

"What was a man like yourself doin' in a street like this?" Sanders inquired. "And why should you be visitin' Mrs. Bible?"

"That's two questions, Mr. Sanders," the ex-schoolmaster replied with a smile, "and I'll take the second one first, because it seems in your mind to be the answer to the first."

"Maybe it does."

"I thought so," Mr. Wigan said, "and I'll answer it in

this way: I have never said that I was coming to visit Mrs. Bible."

Sanders gave a shrewd smile.

"Ye've answered my question, Mr. Wigan," he said. "If ye'd told me ye'd come to offer her a job o' cleaning your house I might've believed ye—and I might not, but it would've been a good answer. Ye didn't give me that answer, so now I know you're up to something. Ye're getting somebody out of a fix like ye did wi' my brother Alec."

Mr. Wigan laughed.

"I don't know that it's quite like that," he said, "but I don't mind telling you that, as you say, I'm up to something."

"Well, Mr. Wigan," Sanders replied seriously, "it's none o' my business, so I won't ask any more. However, I want ye to know this: if there's any way I can help ye just call on me. I know nothing much beyond my trade, but ye helped my brother, and I'm in your debt, and ye're welcome to anything I can do."

"What is your trade, Mr. Sanders?" Mr. Wigan asked, in order to avoid any further talk of this kind.

"I'm foreman mechanic at Stubbs the safe-makers," was the reply, and then with a smile, "There's not many safes that'll be safe from me. Man, I'd make a bonny burglar, I'm thinkin'."



## CHAPTER SEVEN

**I**N THE EXCITEMENT AND bustle of the day's events Mr. Wigan entirely forgot his undertaking to telephone the Superintendent at half-past six, for it was considerably later than that hour when, after seeing the unfortunate victim of the assault placed in an ambulance, he was able to get away from the questioning of police officers who had been called to the woman's house by the constable. He had not been entirely frank during that questioning, for he had said nothing of his intended visit to Mrs. Bible, leaving it to be understood that he had been attracted to the house by the noise made by the screaming child. He had even, by his silence, seemed to acquiesce in the suggestion made by one of the detectives that the incident was in some way discreditable to the poor woman.

It was only when he had left the police station whither he had been invited to give his statement that he looked at the hour. Even then, his sole anxiety was to report the result of the afternoon's inquiries, and he had a moment's surprise when in reply to his ring he heard Channing's exclamation:

"Thank God you're safe, Mr. Wigan!"

"Oh, I'm safe all right," Mr. Wigan replied, "but—oh, yes, I should have telephoned you at six-thirty! I hope I haven't incommoded you in any way, Mr. Channing. I——"

"Oh, no," the Superintendent said with heavy sarcasm. "I haven't given it a thought. Why in—however, would you mind coming along to my office as soon

as you can, and for Heaven's sake, keep your eyes open."

"Really, I would rather go home," Mr. Wigan declared, "I only wanted to report to you some of the things which have resulted from my inquiries and—"

"Better come along here, Mr. Wigan," the Superintendent interrupted, "I have news for you, too."

"Oh, very well, I shall be there in five minutes."

One of Mr. Wigan's peculiarities since his retirement from scholastic work was his refusal to buy an evening paper on the ground that it spoiled his pleasure in the *Daily Telegraph* of the following morning. For the same reason he would not tune in to the wireless news.

"For the first time in my life," he once declared, "I have time to read my morning paper in comfort, so why should I anticipate? The world will not come to an end merely because I am unaware of what has happened in it until twelve hours have elapsed."

No dweller in London, however, can fail to see the placards at every newsvendor's pitch and Mr. Wigan did see them. He amused himself sometimes by speculations regarding the meaning of the more cryptic among them and concocted news stories which he compared on the following day with the version given by his morning paper. On this evening, however, he considered it useless to indulge in this hobby, for the placards were in no way mysterious. As he entered Scotland House he saw that all bore in identical terms the inscription:

### ANOTHER I.R.A. OUTRAGE

His sole reaction to this was the reflection that Channing's department would be particularly busy.

There was no sign of any great activity in the attitude



of the Superintendent when Mr. Wigan entered his room. He was sitting at his desk looking out over the river.

"Well, Mr. Wigan," he said on seeing his visitor, "you have given us a bad time."

"I am extremely sorry," the ex-schoolmaster replied. "I should have remembered, but I was so busy at the police station that it entirely slipped my memory that——"

"What!" Channing interrupted. "You have been at a police station all this time! Well, I'll be—however, tell me what happened."

Mr. Wigan gave a clear and concise account of his movements.

"H'm," the Superintendent said at the end of it. "That, at any rate, settles the question of our inquiries. The connection between the three deaths and that woman is obvious."

"Well, not exactly obvious," Mr. Wigan demurred, "but there is certainly a strong presumption that she may have known something of importance regarding Stavebrook."

"Yes," Channing agreed, "but I am even more interested in the visitors to Stavebrook's flat after his death, especially those people who moved the furniture."

"And I," Mr. Wigan murmured, "am very much interested in the one who called him 'something like Staffbricks' and refused to believe that he had killed himself."

"Yes, he's interesting, no doubt. So are they all," the Superintendent replied, "but from the police point of view the furniture van is something you can trace, whereas the others—well, try and find 'em."

"One of them has appeared again," Mr. Wigan



declared, "in the person of the man who attacked Mrs. Bible."

"And disappeared again," Channing added. "I'll send out an all-stations call to trace that van. By the way, Mr. Wigan, where were you when you were talking to that porter fellow—what's his name? Widdop!"

"In the entrance hall to the flats," Mr. Wigan replied.

"Where anybody could have heard you, I suppose?"

"I dare say," Mr. Wigan agreed, "especially as Widdop's voice is one which has some of the qualities of a peculiarly strident klaxon."

"Well, thanks, Mr. Wigan," the Superintendent said at this point. "You have given me something concrete to go on with. I'll get into touch with the local police at once. Now, as for yourself, I'm afraid we'll have to look after you a bit more closely. You——"

"Really, Mr. Channing," Mr. Wigan objected. "I am not quite an infant in arms——"

"No," the Superintendent interrupted grimly, "but you might damned easily have been an adult in Heaven to-day."

"I was in no danger whatsoever," the ex-schoolmaster declared. "Don't be melodramatic, Mr. Channing. These people, whoever they are, have no intention of making an attempt on my life in any public place, and once I am in my own rooms I can take care of myself. So, I pray you, no—er—police protection, as I think you call it. I should be very embarrassed. Let me look after my own safety. Good evening, Mr. Channing. I shall not forget to telephone to-morrow morning."

"You won't be able to phone me to-morrow from your rooms," Channing grinned, "because your telephone is out of order."

"How do you know? Did you—oh, of course, you



must have rung me up! Oh, it will soon be put right."

Channing rose to his feet and reached for his hat.

"Well," he said, "I suppose you must have your way. However, I'm going with you as far as your digs. Perhaps I'll be able to convince you that you need a nursemaid by the time we get there."

"I shall be delighted to give you a drink," Mr. Wigan replied with a smile, "to help your eloquence."

To Mr. Wigan's surprise the Superintendent led the way out to the Scotland Yard entrance and beckoned to a police car which stood ready in the courtyard.

"This is luxury," the ex-schoolmaster declared, "and I confess I am glad of it. I believe I am actually tired."

When the car reached the street in which Mr. Wigan had his modest rooms, the driver had to use his hooter vigorously in order to disperse the groups of idlers who were standing about.

"What on earth is happening here?" Mr. Wigan asked.

"Nothing," the Superintendent replied. "It is all over now."

"What do you mean?"

"Take a look up at your windows," Channing invited as he got out first.

Mr. Wigan hurried out after him and looked up. Where his neatly curtained windows had been that morning there were now two gaping holes from which hung precariously splintered pieces of wood and tattered material.

"Come on," Channing said when his companion had had a long look, "let us have a closer view."

Mr. Wigan said nothing, but followed the Superintendent past the policeman at the door and up the stairs. Half-way up he asked:

"Was anybody injured?"

"Yes," Channing replied.

"Not Mrs. Gurney?"

"Your landlady?" the Superintendent replied. "No, she is not hurt—damn her!"

They reached the second floor on which Mr. Wigan's rooms were situated. The banisters had disappeared and a door hung on one hinge. Two men were rummaging about among the remains of Mr. Wigan's possessions.

"Found anything, Sharp?" Channing asked one of them.

"Enough," the man replied, "to tell us that it was a bomb set to explode as the door opened—a sort of booby trap affair."

"Goodness gracious!" Mr. Wigan exclaimed; "so this is the I.R.A. outrage!"

"I.R.A. my foot!" the man called Sharp exclaimed. "This is no I.R.A. job!"

"No!" Mr. Wigan nodded. "No! obviously not!" He turned away.

"How did it happen?" he asked Channing.

"Let's go down to the car," the latter said. "Our chaps will salvage what they can of your stuff. Come on home and dine with me. I've already told my wife you're coming, so don't shake your head."

Back in the car, Channing began his story.

"When I got no message from you," he said, "I rang up your number, but got no reply. I then called young Arnside—I think you know him—and we drove to your house. We found that silly woman, Mrs. Gurney, in her kitchen and asked her if you had come back. She said that she hadn't seen you. I asked her why she hadn't answered your phone, and was told that she had some-



thing else to do besides traipsing all the way upstairs to find that somebody had got a wrong number. Lucky for her she felt like that about it! It would have served her right, though! I asked her if anybody had come to see you and she told a confused yarn about a Chinaman who brought your laundry."

"A Chinaman? My laundry? The woman is demented. My laundry is delivered on Saturday."

"Never mind," Channing said, "this fellow came with your laundry, he said. You had changed your day or something. He had orders to deliver it at once. Mrs. Gurney evidently felt lazy, for she told this Chinaman to leave the parcel on the stairs. He was very pleasant and insisted that he wanted it placed in your room. It might get crushed and so on. Your landlady refused to go up then, and the fellow—still very pleasant—volunteered to go up in her place. The damn fool woman let him go. She doesn't seem to know how long he was up there, but he came down again, told her he had placed the parcel on a chair near the door, praised the tidiness of her house and cleared off. Now, when I heard this I didn't at first think of a bomb or anything like that. It was young Arnside who suggested what you would call the melodramatic idea of a cocked pistol. We borrowed a broom handle from Mrs. Gurney and went up. Your door was slightly ajar."

"It always is," Mr. Wigan explained, "while I am out. A question of ventilation."

"Well, Arnside and I stood on the stairs," Channing went on, "our heads on a level with your floor, and he pushed the door fully open with the broom-handle. Nothing happened, so we went into your sitting-room. There was no parcel there. We pushed on as far as your bedroom door. It was shut. Arnside was going to open

it when I suggested that if there was anything in his idea of a pistol cocked at us we'd better lie down on the floor and try to turn the handle that way. I felt a fool lying there with one of my own men. However, we got the handle turned and I pushed the door gently. Nothing happened. I pushed it farther. Still nothing. Then young Arnside jumped up to his feet laughing at his own silly fancies and gave the door a little kick."

Channing stopped and emitted a "Phoo!"

"Well, Mr. Wigan," he went on again, "I don't know what happened then. All the artillery in the world seemed to go off at once. The next thing I knew was that I was carrying Arnside downstairs, and things were dropping all round me. The Gurney woman was yelling and—oh, well, I got Arnside out and——"

"Was he badly hurt?" Mr. Wigan asked.

Channing nodded.

"Yes," he replied. "Concussion, and he may lose a leg—the one he kicked the door open with."



## CHAPTER EIGHT

"IT IS ALL VERY silly," Mr. Wigan said suddenly during their drive to Channing's house in Ealing. "Silly and melodramatic."

"Yes," Channing agreed, "but a silly and melodramatic bomb is just as deadly as any other."

"That is not a very clever remark," Mr. Wigan snapped peevishly.

"No, you're quite right, it isn't," the Superintendent replied, "but it was meant to express a bit more than it said."

"I fail to see the drift of that," the ex-schoolmaster declared.

Channing looked sideways at his neighbour and decided to explain.

"All right," he said; "what I really meant was this: what's the use of saying that it is all silly and melodramatic? Perhaps it is, but the essential point is that it happened. An attempt has been made on your life, and that is that."

"Why has an attempt been made on my life?" Mr. Wigan asked.

"Obviously," Channing replied, "because somebody has cottoned on to the idea that you know or suspect something about the deaths of those three people who have been considered suicides up to the present. You are not to be allowed to find out any more about them."

"Quite so," Mr. Wigan said, nodding vigorously. "Quite so! Does it not seem strange, however, that

you are not included among those who have the same suspicions as I have?"

"Oh, I am probably included all right," the Superintendent said comfortably, "but I'm only a unit in an organization. You are a meddling busybody."

"Nevertheless," Mr. Wigan protested, "it is all out of character. Whoever heard of spies being anxious to do other than avoid notice? These people not only draw attention to themselves, they actually take the initiative in violence."

Channing laughed.

"In the first place," he declared, "we don't really know whether we are dealing with spies or not. That is to say, we have no proof. And anyhow, the old type of spy who was content with getting information quietly and secretly has almost disappeared. The new type does not confine himself to that sort of thing. Sabotage is an essential part of their work nowadays. Believe me, we in the Department know that a lot of money is being spent by certain foreign governments in fomenting trouble, damaging machinery, and generally upsetting the normal routine of life. The idea is, you see, that it will undermine the morale of the English people—a silly idea, of course, based on an imperfect knowledge of our country, but one that is held by many foreigners who read our yellow panic Press."

"Do you include the I.R.A. activities among the acts of—er—sabotage you refer to?" Mr. Wigan asked. "Surely those fellows know better than that?"

"Now, there you're getting on to ticklish ground," the Superintendent declared. "There are several factors at work there. These I.R.A. chaps are often decent young chaps whose minds have been worked on by clever people until they are fanatically convinced that their



cause is a holy one. A fanatic, as you know, doesn't reason, but even if these fellows did they'd tell you, as one of them told me with some justification, that Ireland never got anything out of England until she made a hell of a fuss about it. Now, take this fanaticism, join to it the money and directive genius of a clever agent of a foreign Power and what do you get? You get something which you and many others call silly and melodramatic."

"Very instructive," Mr. Wigan said dryly, "but hardly applicable to this incident of to-day."

"No?" Channing exclaimed. "Well, perhaps not. We shall see. But we're getting near to our dinner and I warn you that my wife bars all talk of police work within our four walls."

"Very rightly," Mr. Wigan approved, and seemed to shake off his thoughts like a dog emerging from the water.

During the meal which followed he charmed Mrs. Channing who, because of her own ban on 'shop,' was consumed with unsatisfied curiosity regarding the untoward happenings which had brought this unexpected guest to her house.

During the night, however, Mr. Wigan lay awake for longer than was his custom and at the following morning's breakfast it was obvious that he had some difficulty in avoiding the forbidden topic; as soon therefore as the two men had reached the pavement outside he burst forth.

"Look here," he said, "I strongly object to being bombed——"

"And so say all of us!" Channing chuckled, busy with his pipe.

"I object to being bombed," Mr. Wigan repeated, "without striking back."



"It's rather difficult to strike back," the Superintendent declared, "until you know where you should strike."

"I propose to find out," Mr. Wigan announced.

"So do I," Channing replied, "but how, I don't know yet. It is possible that our people may have found something useful at your rooms. If they haven't, all we've got to go on are the square-headed fellow—unnamed—who seems to have attacked Mrs. Bible, a mysterious Oriental who went to your rooms, and some vague visitors to Stavebrook's flat."

"Surely you have more than that," Mr. Wigan said, "if in the past you have been having two of the men who died under observation."

"Yes, that is true," Channing agreed, "though it's very little. You see, it's not very probable that the people at a foreign consulate will give us a handle. They are sure to be keeping out of the limelight. Still, we are keeping them and their visitors under observation. The trouble is that we haven't enough men."

"You have, I presume, no objection to my continuing my inquiries?" Mr. Wigan said.

"No—no, but for Heaven's sake be careful, Mr. Wigan," the Superintendent replied, "and report either in person or by phone to my office at intervals of, say, two hours. What direction are your inquiries going to take?"

"I am interested," the ex-schoolmaster answered, "in the visitors to Stavebrook's place after his death."

"You haven't got much to catch hold of there."

"Nevertheless," Mr. Wigan declared, "I am going to take a chance shot, but I shall require official help."

"You can have it," was the reply, "unless it means taking men off my strength. I need all I've got."



"Oh, it's nothing like that. I want you to introduce me to the officer in charge of the control of Aliens and ask him to give me facilities such as inspecting the Register of Aliens—if there is such a thing."

"Oh, there is such a thing," Channing laughed, "and I'll put you in touch with Pat Mulhearn who's in charge of it. I don't know how it will help, though. The Register is all right if you have a name, but without that I'm hanged if I know what use it is."

"I think I have a name," Mr. Wigan declared.

"Oh? I wonder where you got it?"

Mr. Wigan laughed gently.

"There used to be a series of detective stories," he said, "with the last couple of chapters sealed. You were told that you were in possession of all the facts and invited to work out the solution of the mystery for yourself. Now, you know everything that I know, so I invite you to work this one out for yourself."

Channing laughed tolerantly.

"All right," he said, "have it your own way. I've got too many things to work out already without adding that one. I'll introduce you to Inspector Mulhearn."

An hour later Mr. Wigan was talking to an inspector whose Northern Irish accent was unmistakable.

"Anything Mick Channing wants done," he told the ex-schoolmaster, "gets done in this office. Now, how can I help you, Misther Wigan?"

"I should like to know," Mr. Wigan declared, "whether on the Aliens' Register there is inscribed anybody whose name may be Stavrich, which may be spelled in any one of several different ways—or Stavritz, or Stabrich, or Stabritz. I should think that the spelling with 'v' is more probable."



"Any idea of the nationality?" the inspector asked. "It sounds like Yugoslav or Czechoslovak to me."

"I don't really know," Mr. Wigan replied, "but I have an idea that the man is probably a native of what used to be known as Czechoslovakia. Now, he would probably be registered as a German."

"Not he," Mulhearn declared. "If he was a Czechoslovak he's still a Czechoslovak as far as we're concerned. We haven't recognized that dirty bit of work—yet. However, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you a list of the people with names as near to that as we can find, whatever their nationality. When would you like it?"

"As soon as possible," Mr. Wigan replied with an air of diffidence.

"That means ye want it now," the Irishman laughed. "All right. I'll see about it. Just read the paper or smoke in here while I get things going."

Mr. Wigan, though he knew the efficiency with which records are kept, was surprised when the inspector returned in a few minutes with a typed slip of paper.

"That was an easy one," Mulhearn announced. "There is only one name like that on our lists. There's dozens of Stavropuloses, but only one Stavrich. Your first shot at the name was right."

Mr. Wigan beamed.

"I think," he said, "that we are both to be congratulated in that case—I on being such a good guesser and you on your wonderful efficiency. Now, Inspector, what information can you give me about this Stavrich? I don't want you to infringe official secrets, but——"

"Ach! Didn't I tell you you have the run of the house once you're sent by Mick Channing?" the inspector replied. "You can have all the information about the



man we have ourselves. Here you are: Jan Stavrich, born in Pardubice, on the 5th December, 1889; profession, journalist; authorized to remain in England for one year; arrived in this country three weeks ago to-day. There's a note from one of my men that he is mixing in Czech circles in London, with people who are known to be anti-German. That's about all."

"And his address?"

"You want that, too? He lives at 32, Colesfoot Gardens, S.W.18. That's somewhere near Wandsworth Park, I believe. But here, take this paper. It's all typed out for you."

Mr. Wigan, polite always, remained to talk of other matters with the inspector, who seemed willing to chat.

"Yes," the Irishman said, in reply to some remark made by Mr. Wigan, "this Aliens' work is interesting. You come across some queer birds sometimes. Of course, with the political situation as it is, we have to keep our eyes wide open, and all these refugees complicate matters a bit. Refugees! You know, Mr. Wigan, that word is like charity—it covers a multitude of sins."

"In what way?" Mr. Wigan asked.

"Oh, in many ways," was the reply. "For instance, some of the people who call themselves refugees are nothing more nor less than crooks, and then there's another lot—the ones from Czechoslovakia. You'd be surprised to know that quite a lot of them are no more refugees than you or me. They're bloomin' German police spies—the Gestapo, they're called. I believe—sent over here to keep an eye on their own people and on real refugees. You know, I wouldn't put it past them to do any sort of dirty work, up to murder."

"What do you do about them?" Mr. Wigan asked.

"Ah, now you're askin'," the inspector said. "There's

very little we *can* do until we get proof. I've got a sergeant out there who says he can spot them at once—and he *has* spotted half a dozen that I know of because we got the proof afterwards—but if they conduct themselves decently and their passports and permits are in order we can't do anything, though I've worked out a tricky bit of work myself. One fellow, with a Czechoslovak passport, was a Gestapo agent without a doubt, but we couldn't get the goods on him. However, I have a lad who went out and struck up an acquaintance with him, treated him to a devil of a lot of drink and then picked a quarrel with him. Next day our friend was before the beak for assault. The magistrate read him a lecture on how a refugee should behave and, silly old fool—fined him instead of giving him about three months. 'All right, me lad,' I says to myself, 'I'll fix you!' So I sat down and wrote a report on him, saying he was idle and quarrelsome and undesirable, and without visible means of subsistence, and I asked for him to be sent back to his own country. It's still under consideration, but you see, if he's kicked out the Germans can't protest because he's supposed to be a Czech refugee, and the Czechs can't because they can't do anything at all."

Mr. Wigan at last stemmed the conversational flow and set out for Wandsworth.



## CHAPTER NINE

THE ADDRESS GIVEN BY Inspector Mulhearn turned out to be a boarding-house kept by the Polish wife of a disabled ex-officer, who was evidently a sort of general factotum in the place. It was he who received Mr. Wigan.

"Stavrich?" he answered the ex-schoolmaster's question. "Yes, he lives here, but we see very little of him. He leaves after breakfast and does not come back until dinner time, and sometimes not even then. Won't you leave a message?"

Mr. Wigan would not leave a message; he wanted to ask a few questions of the elderly cripple, but did not know how to do so without incurring the risk of a snub. Captain Richardson, however, gave him an opening.

"Are you a friend of Stavrich?" he asked.

"No," Mr. Wigan replied. "I—er—merely came to ask him a few questions."

"Oh, you are from the police?"

"My inquiries are connected with the Aliens Department and the Special Branch," Mr. Wigan said with a *suggestio falsi* which, however necessary, was distasteful to him.

"Surely Stavrich doesn't need to report again so soon!" Richardson exclaimed. "My wife went along to Bow Street with him only a week or two ago."

"Oh, no," the ex-schoolmaster told him, "he is quite in order from that point of view."

"That's good! We do our best here to keep our guests

up to scratch. You see, they are nearly all aliens—from the Slavonic countries—one recommends another. And then my wife is a Pole and can talk to them in their own languages. She's a great linguist, my wife."

"She must have a very busy time," Mr. Wigan said, "if she even goes to Bow Street with them."

"Yes," the ex-officer replied, "especially of late, when so many of them are coming over who don't know English. Stavrich, however, can make himself understood fairly well. When he first came he told us—or my wife was under that impression—that he had a brother somewhere in England, but that he didn't know his address until he heard from somebody in America or Canada—I don't know which. Then, one day when my wife asked him if he had found his brother, he said that he had no brother. Since then he has been a bit strange. He used to be a cheery sort of fellow, but he's gone all moody and glum nowadays."

"Indeed? I wonder what changed him!" Mr. Wigan said innocently.

Captain Richardson made a gesture expressive of tolerant comprehension.

"Well," he said, "these poor devils of Czechs haven't much to make them cheerful these days. With their country invaded by the Boche and their affairs all in disorder there's nothing very cheerful in life for them. I do think, though, that there's something more personal about Stavrich's gloom. He seems to have the impression that he's surrounded by enemies. He mutters to himself sometimes, and my wife heard him once say something about carrying the war into the enemy's camp. I hope he's not going to start something political. We don't want that."

"No," Mr. Wigan agreed, "we don't want that."



"I hope your inquiries have no connection with that sort of thing," Richardson said questioningly.

"Only indirectly," Mr. Wigan replied discreetly. "By the way, did you get the impression that Stavrich was pro-German?"

"Pro-German? Good Heavens, no, sir. The very mention of Germans or Germany simply infuriates him. When he first came here we had one of those Sudeten fellows staying with us. He was a nasty bit of work, I'll admit, but he was a paying guest. Owing to Stavrich's attitude towards him, however, he left. Personally speaking, I was glad to see the back of his ugly head. He was more Prussian than the Prussians. Indeed, both Stavrich and my wife said he *was* a Prussian, though the fellow's passport said he was born in Karlsbad."

"Was he a stocky, fair-haired man with—er—no back to his head?" Mr. Wigan ventured.

"That describes him exactly," Richardson replied, "and you might add that he had no neck."

"I think I know the fellow," Mr. Wigan declared, "but I've forgotten his name—now, what was it?"

"This man's name was Zimmermann," Richardson said.

"Then, perhaps, it's not the same," Mr. Wigan dissembled. "I don't think the man I have in mind was called Zimmermann."

After a few questions regarding the hour when Stavrich was likely to be at the boarding-house the ex-schoolmaster took leave of the talkative Richardson. He decided, after some thought, to go to Channing's office and report in person. The Superintendent was out, but Mr. Wigan left a written message with a sergeant and again visited Inspector Mulhearn. This officer gave no sign if he felt that the ex-schoolmaster



was importunate, but received him with a cheerful grin.

"Found your Czecho, Mr. Wigan?" he asked.

"I haven't yet met him," Mr. Wigan replied, "and I'm afraid I'll have to bother you again."

"No bother!" Mulhearn declared. "What can I do this time?"

"I want information about a man called Zimmermann, born in Karlsbad, who used to live at the same address as Stavrich, 32, Colesfoot Gardens."

"Zimmermann?" the inspector echoed. "H'm! I'm glad you gave his birthplace and an address. There must be dozens of Zimmermanns on our lists. However, we'll have a shot at him."

He telephoned instructions to a neighbouring room and in a few minutes a policeman arrived with a card.

"We have," he reported, "an Adolf Zimmermann, born in Karlsbad, of Czechoslovak nationality, profession, musician, and living at 32, Colesfoot Gardens. He has not reported any change of address."

"He hasn't, eh?" Mulhearn said. "Then, that means we've got to find him."

"If you do," Mr. Wigan put in, "I should be glad if you could detain him until I have a look at him. He may be a man wanted by Mr. Channing."

"We'll detain him, never fear, Mr. Wigan," the inspector promised.

"Excuse me, sir," the constable, who was still waiting, said, "but Sergeant Babcock says this Zimmermann is one of the people he's had his suspicions about."

"Then he's a wrong 'un," Mulhearn declared promptly. "Tell Sergeant Babcock to start looking for him."

When the constable had left the room the inspector smiled at Mr. Wigan.



"We'll get him. Don't worry," he said. "I suppose this is all linked up with the attempt to blow you up, Mr. Wigan. I didn't realize this morning that you were nearly the victim of that business. I'm glad young Arnside won't lose his leg."

"Oh, I'm very pleased, too, to hear that," Mr. Wigan replied, "but I see the I.R.A. is still being blamed for the explosion."

"Yes," Mulhearn answered. "I don't suppose the I.R.A. will mind very much, but if you ask me they aren't responsible for a good many things blamed on them. The Lord knows I'm no Republican, but I'm sorry for those chaps—getting twenty years for making a bit of a bang, when spies get a couple of years, and even an officer who turned traitor only gets a seven-year sentence."

Mr. Wigan did not feel called upon to express an opinion on this topic.

When he left the inspector he felt somehow deflated. Unaccustomed to police work he was disappointed that his inquiries had not given any immediate result. He was not so confident as Inspector Mulhearn that Zimmermann would be found easily. He ate a light luncheon in a Lyons Corner House, and felt that he was a useless member of society when after sitting over the meal a long time he could not think of anything to do. In the ordinary way he would have gone home to his rooms, but he had no desire yet to inspect the wreck of his few possessions. He wandered along Whitehall as if some magnet were drawing him towards Scotland Yard again. Finally, he decided to try to see Channing and entered Scotland House. The Superintendent was there filling his small room with a cloud of tobacco smoke, through which Mr. Wigan saw him hunched up in his chair.

"Ah!" Channing said. "So you're back! I got your message. I've got a bit of news for you that will interest you."

"Yes?"

"Yes, another bloke has walked out of a window—on the fifth floor, this time."

"Good Heavens!" Mr. Wigan exclaimed. "Who is it this time?"

"We don't know," was the reply. "He has nothing on him to identify him, not even one of those Japanese proverb things. This time nobody saw the thing happen except a small boy—and all he saw was the body hitting the pavement."

"Have you seen the body?" Mr. Wigan asked.

"No, and I don't want to," Channing replied.

"I do," Mr. Wigan said. "Where is it?"

"In the Westminster mortuary, I suppose. All right, I'll go with you, but wait till you hear the rest of my news. We can't find the drivers of the car and the lorry concerned in those other two deaths. It looks as if your suspicions were correct."

Mr. Wigan did not say anything.

"Furthermore," Channing added, "the registration number of the lorry is one which went out of use long ago. I'm surprised that wasn't noticed at the time."

"I presume that was because there appeared to be no reason for suspecting anything," Mr. Wigan said. "When can we go to the mortuary?"

"As soon as you wish," Channing replied. "Come now, if you like."

At the mortuary they were shown a figure covered with a sheet.

"There's going to be a post-mortem, sir," the attendant volunteered to Channing.



The latter nodded and pulled the sheet aside. The face underneath was that of a singularly unattractive individual. Stout, fair and heavy-jowled, the body lay on its back. Mr. Wigan hardly looked at the face, but took between his fingers the lapel of the grey jacket the man wore.

"That," he said, "is foreign material—the *ersatz* stuff they are using in Germany nowadays."

"A foreigner, eh?" Channing asked.

"Yes," said Mr. Wigan, "and—er—could the body be turned over?"

"I think so. Why not?" the Superintendent replied.

He called two attendants and gave them the necessary instructions. They turned the body over.

Mr. Wigan looked at the back thus exposed. The clothes were dusty and crumpled, but he paid no attention to them. He walked backwards and studied the body from various viewpoints.

"I think," he said then to Channing, "that this is the body of one Adolf Zimmermann, who formerly lived at 32, Colesfoot Gardens, in Wandsworth, but for more certainty I advise you to call upon Mr. and Mrs. Richardson — sorry, Captain Richardson — of that address, to identify him."

Channing looked at Mr. Wigan in astonishment.

"How do you do it?" he said, "and who in the name of goodness is Adolf Zimmermann?"

"I don't know, but it is my opinion," Mr. Wigan replied, "that he is the man who attacked a helpless woman yesterday."

"What? Mrs. Bible?"

"Yes."

"H'm. Well, I suppose you'll give me details later. I wonder how he came to get this particular punishment."

"It might not be a bad idea," Mr. Wigan suggested, "when you are getting the Richardsons, to invite Mr. Jan Stavrich, also of the same address, to answer a few questions on that matter."

Channing laughed.

"Look here!" he exclaimed. "What have you been up to, Mr. Wigan? You're putting something across me with this Sherlock Holmes business."

Mr. Wigan smiled.

"I suppose," he said, "I should say: 'Elementary, my dear Lestrade,' but I refrain."

"You'd better," Channing replied, and turning to the attendants said: "We've finished. Turn him round again and cover him up."



## CHAPTER TEN

MRS. RICHARDSON, A MIDDLE-AGED Polish woman who spoke English with considerable fluency and a total disregard of grammatical rules, fulfilled Mr. Wigan's expectations and identified the body at the mortuary as that of Adolf Zimmermann. She had, however, little information to give concerning her late boarder. She told Channing frankly that she had never liked the man, but admitted that she could give no tangible reason for her dislike.

"Perhaps," the Superintendent suggested, "it was because he was a Sudeten German."

"Sudeten German!" Mrs. Richardson exclaimed with an expressive gesture. "He was not a Sudeten German. He lie when he say that!"

"Didn't his passport say so?" Channing asked.

"Pooh! Passport!" was the lady's contemptuous retort. "Eef I go into your countree and take every-theeng, I can also take a large parcel of your passports, not true? Then I geeve them to people who work for me and tell zem to go to ozzer countrees to spy. Not so?"

"Yes," the Superintendent admitted with a smile. "I dare say it could be done."

"Eet ees done!" Mrs. Richardson declared. "Matka Boska! I know a Prussian when I see 'eem, and zis Zimmermann, he ees a Prussian. He do not talk like anybody ozzer. He bark—bow-bow!—every time he open 'ees mouth."

"When he stayed with you," Channing asked, "did he ever receive any visitors?"

"No! Never! Who would veeset such a man? Once a man come—a little yellow man—how you say? A Yaponchik—a——"

"A Japanese?"

"Yes, a Japanese. He come one day and wished to see Zimmermann, but Zimmermann was out and the Yap—Japanese he went away."

"What was the trouble," the Superintendent asked, "between Zimmermann and one of your other guests, Stavrich?"

"Trouble? Weeth Pan Stavreech?" Mrs. Richardson echoed. "Oh, yes. Oh, it was nozzing much. Dey argue and fight—oh, not with the hands, with the words——"

"Quarrelled?"

"Yes, they quarrelled, and Stavreech tell Zimmermann he is a Prussian. Oh, Pan Stavreech, he was very angry. I deed not hear the beegenning and I deed not onderstand all they talked about."

"Do you," Channing asked, "by any chance remember anything of what they said—any phrases, for example?"

The Polish lady put her head to one side and closed one eye, looking with the other across her nose at the ceiling. It was not pretty but it was evidently her way of showing that she was searching her memory.

"No," she said at last. "Zey were talking too loud! Ah, you sink zat is fonny. No, in my salon when you talk very loud there is a echo—ah, a terrible echo, and it go all boom-boom. So, you see, when one is outside one hears only ze noise and ze boom-boom."

"I see," the Superintendent said with his most amiable smile. "Well, I think I won't trouble you any more, Mrs. Richardson. Thanks very much for coming down. I'll send you home in a car."



Mrs. Richardson was evidently impressed by this attention.

"You are verree kind," she said with obvious pleasure. "I am sorry I cannot help you more."

Channing rose and escorted her downstairs.

"Oh, by the way," he asked on the way, "what language did Stavrich and Zimmermann use?"

"Oh, German," was the prompt reply. "Mr. Stavreech speaks very good German, but he say Zimmermann speaked—spoke not Czech."

As she was about to enter the car provided for her Mrs. Richardson turned back to Channing.

"My goodness, 'e is ogly that Zimmermann—more ogly as when he lived. Bssh!"

"He is certainly not a pretty sight," Channing agreed, "but then, none of us would look very attractive, Madame, after throwing ourselves from a window."

"That one—he never throw himself," the lady said emphatically as she settled herself comfortably. "He was throwed by some one who deed not like heem."

"Why do you say that, Mrs. Richardson?" Channing asked, signing to the chauffeur not to move yet.

"Why? Oh, I do not know. Zimmermann, he was like zat. Everee day even me I want to heet heem. He was joost so—so nastee everybody hate heem. My guests—they all was verree glad when he leave after hees fight—hees quarrel with Pan Stavreech."

"I see," the Superintendent said. "Well, good-bye, Mrs. Richardson, and thank you. We will probably want you to identify him at the inquest."

"Oh, I do not——"

But Channing had given the signal to start and the rest of Mrs. Richardson's phrase was lost.

On his return to his office the Superintendent found



a message to tell him that Stavrich was awaiting his pleasure at Cannon Row police station. He immediately telephoned down for the Czech to be brought up. While he was waiting Mr. Wigan poked his head timidly in past the door-leaf.

"Come in, Mr. Wigan," Channing invited. "Come in and sit down—no, not there, over there by the window."

Mr. Wigan took the chair indicated—one which had its back to the window.

"You were right," the Superintendent went on. "That fellow was Zimmermann."

"I was sure of it," Mr. Wigan said, "as soon as I saw the back of his neck and his shoulders."

"You were? I seem to remember you mentioning his name before ever you saw him. How did you do it?"

"Oh, it was pure guesswork," Mr. Wigan replied.

"I thought you didn't indulge in guesswork," the Superintendent said with a smile, "as being unscientific."

"Every scientific research worker indulges in guesswork," the ex-schoolmaster declared seriously, "though he doesn't call it that."

"Just like a detective!"

"Quite so."

"Your friend Stavrich will be here in a moment," Channing said. "I'm glad you're here. You may be able to think of some questions for him."

"Probably," Mr. Wigan declared.

A few minutes later Stavrich was ushered into the room. He was a stocky man of medium height, of Teutonic rather than Slavonic aspect, due perhaps to the fact that his head was closely cropped after the manner of many Germans, and that his blue eyes behind the thick lenses of his spectacles seemed to bulge. He



glanced quickly from Mr. Wigan to Channing and back again with an air of distrust and apprehension.

"I do not understand," he began, but Channing rose to his feet and waved him amiably to the chair which faced the window.

"Sit down, Mr. Stavrich," he said cordially, "I'm glad you were able to come."

"I come," the Czech replied seating himself gingerly, "because a policeman say I must come."

"The main thing is, Mr. Stavrich, that you're here," Channing laughed.

Stavrich looked bewildered by this reception, but he sat back more comfortably.

"I do not understand," he repeated then. "Have I something not right done?"

"Oh, I just want to ask you a few questions," the Superintendent said, "if you will."

"I will answer if I can," Stavrich replied.

His English was laboured and it was evident that he was mentally translating from a more familiar tongue. Channing, accustomed to dealing with aliens, concluded that the apparent hesitation before each answer was due to the fact.

"Your name is Jan Stavrich?" he began.

"Yes."

"Where and when were you born?"

"Pardubice, five December, 1889," Stavrich replied as if accustomed to this question.

"Good!" Channing went on "You live at 32, Colesfoot Gardens?"

"Yes."

"Did you meet there a Mr. Adolf Zimmermann?"

Stavrich rose to his feet.

"Zimmermann!" he exclaimed. "Ha! Yes. Now I

know. This Zimmermann he tell lies about me, and you——”

“Sit down, Mr. Stavrich,” Channing said placidly, “and be good enough to confine yourself to answering my questions. Did you know Adolf Zimmermann?”

Stavrich sat down.

“Yes,” he answered then.

“He was also from Czechoslovakia?”

Stavrich again jumped up, but sat down as his eyes met those of the Superintendent.

“No,” he replied. “He say he is Sudeten German, but I say he is *echt*—true German from Germany.”

“Why do you say that?” Channing asked.

Stavrich seemed to look for the words necessary for his reply.

“If,” he said then, “a man meet you in Czechoslovakia and say he is English you will not believe him when he speak like a—like an American.”

Channing smiled.

“I see your point,” he said. “So you don’t believe he was a Sudeten German? Was that why you quarrelled?”

“I tell him I do not believe him and I say he is Prussian. Then he get angry and talk more Prussian than before.”

“H’m! Then he left the boarding-house?”

“Yes.”

“Have you seen him since?”

“One time,” Stavrich replied. “I see him go in a house in the City—a house where many offices are.”

“Do you remember the address of that house?”

“No, but I can go there. It is little street.”

“Well, perhaps we might ask you to show us the place,” Channing said. “Did you speak to him when you saw him?”



"No, I did not speak to him. Why should I speak to him?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Channing answered innocently. "But Mr. Stavrich, why should this Zimmermann call himself a Sudeten German if he is really a Prussian?"

"Because," Stavrich replied, "he wish to pretend he is refugee Social Democrat who do not like the Hitler Germany."

"Why should he do that?" Channing persisted. "What does it matter here in England?"

"You say it do not matter?" Stavrich answered, "but it matter very much. If I think he is Sudetener I say open what I think of Hitler, but if he is Prussian I do not talk at all."

"You mean, then, by that," the Superintendent said, "that he was a spy?"

"Yes," was the forcible reply, "he was a spy. A spy against England, and against Czechs in England."

"Did you ever mention him to any other Czechs?" Channing asked.

"Mention him? I warn. I tell everybody he is spy."

"Oh, you did? Didn't you threaten to kill him?"

Stavrich smiled for the first time.

"Oh, yes," he replied. "I tell him I kill him when I meet him not in England, but I cannot kill him in England where I am refugee. I not break the law of your country."

"That's very nice of you," Channing murmured.

"Oh, no, that is what you call good manner!" Stavrich replied in all seriousness.

"Well, Mr. Stavrich," was the Superintendent's comment on this, "I wish everybody's manners were as good as yours."

Stavrich looked blank.

"I not understand," he said.

"No? Well, I'll explain," the Superintendent told him. "Adolf Zimmermann is dead, and we think he was murdered."

Stavrich was unmoved.

"Ah!" he said. "Dead! So! I am glad."



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

"SO YOU'RE GLAD, ARE you?" Channing asked. "Now, why should a fellow-being's death bring you such pleasure?"

Stavrich considered this a moment. It was possible that the Superintendent's English was too intricate for him. He frowned at first and then looked up quickly.

"Why I am glad?" he said. "Because Adolf Zimmermann was enemy of my country."

Channing's expression gave no indication whether he considered this an adequate reason or not.

"Could you," he asked, "give me an account of your movements during the past twenty-four hours?"

"That is where I have gone, no?"

"Yes."

Stavrich looked at Channing from under frowning brows.

"I not understand why you wish this to know," he replied, "but you are police and I must tell."

"Oh, no," the Superintendent, always fair, informed the Czech. "Oh, no, there is no 'must' about it."

"You mean it is not—how do you say?—not obligation?"

"There is no compulsion," Channing explained.

"Ah! That is the English freedom, not true?" Stavrich replied. "Then I tell you all."

"Good!" the Superintendent applauded. "Suppose you begin with yesterday morning."

"Suppose? Ah, you mean I give all day of yesterday?"

Channing nodded.

"Yes," Stavrich consented. "I do that. I get up from bed at eight o'clock. Then I have the English breakfast, bacon and egg. At half-nine—no, at half-past eight—I go to British Museum. I study and write there till one o'clock. Then I go to eat—coffee and what you call toad in hole. I go back to British Museum and remain till six o'clock. Then I go back to my lodging. I eat dinner and I talk to Mr. Janecek, who live there, too. Then I go to bed at ten o'clock. To-day I get from bed at eight o'clock and afterwards I do like yesterday, but after dinner I come here in police motor and do not talk to Mr. Janecek."

Channing looked at Mr. Wigan, who took his cue.

"Mr. Stavrich," he said, "are you married?"

"No," Stavrich replied, obviously surprised at this question from the hitherto silent person near the window.

"Have you any brothers or sisters?" was the next question.

There was a slight hesitation before the reply came: "No."

"But," Mr. Wigan insisted, "you have a brother."

"My brother—he is dead," Stavrich said sombrely.

"I think I met your brother," Mr. Wigan went on. "He was in Canada, wasn't he?"

The Czech's face brightened up.

"Ah, you knew my brother in Canada?" he said. "He is very good fellow, not true?"

"He was a very foolish fellow," Mr. Wigan replied, ignoring the question of where he had known the man.

Stavrich peered closely at the ex-schoolmaster.

"My brother was fool, yes," he said, "but not in Canada. In Canada he is good fellow and work hard."

"Perhaps, but in England?" Mr. Wigan asked.



Stavrich said nothing.

"You knew that he had come to England?" Mr. Wigan persevered.

"Yes, I knew."

"And you knew what he was doing here?"

Again there was no reply.

"Why don't you answer?" Mr. Wigan asked.

Stavrich remained silent.

"Oh, very good, Mr. Stavrich," Mr. Wigan said. "If you wish it so. I can only come to the conclusion that you, like your brother, have come to England to do the same things as your brother did."

Stavrich rose to his feet.

"My brother is dead," he said. "I am alive but I work not what he do. I work against. I am not a——"

"A what, Mr. Stavrich," Mr. Wigan asked. "You were going to say that you are not a spy. Isn't that so?"

Stavrich sat down again.

"You mean," his tormentor went on, "that you are here to work against those who killed David Stavebrook?"

Stavrich nodded.

"You know," he said dully. "First I think perhaps you are pretend to know my brother, but I see now you know him. Yes. David change his name in Canada. Then he come here and work bad things for bad people. They kill him because he not wish to work no more for them. But I kill them."

"I shouldn't do that in England," Channing put in.

"No, I not kill them in England," the Czech said, "but I kill them in Germany and in my country."

"Why not tell us all about your brother," the Superintendent said. "Whatever he did nothing can hurt him now."



"That is true—nothing hurt him now," Stavrich replied. "Yes, I tell. David, he is my younger brother. When he finish his instruction and get his diploma he go to Canada. There he works as engineer by airplane company. He spend too much money and I think perhaps some Germans in Canada give him money to give plans. I do not know. One day he writes to me and says he is going to England, and says I should meet him in London, because he will tell me something of important. I write to him and reply that I am only poor journalist and cannot make this journey to England without money. Then I hear nothing until one day David come to Praha. He tell me there that he wish me coming to London, and that he and I make plenty money. I ask how, and he tell me that he know a man who give great sums for reports on air defence of England."

Here, Stavrich stopped and gulped. Then he looked at Channing with a piteous air and peered as if to see the expression on Mr. Wigan's face.

"Please excuse," he went on, "when I speak of this moment. David is my young brother and when I remember that on that day I hit him in the face I am sad. I never see him again. Then you know what happens. Hitler send his soldiers and there is no more Czechoslovakia. I receive a letter from my brother and he say that I am right to hit him, because he was doing how you say?—dirty work for Germans who kill our country. I write to him and say I am glad, but I tell him it is dirty work even if Germany do not take our country. To be spy, I tell him, for any country except your own is dirty work, but more dirty when he is spy against the country where he is now British subject. My brother became Canadian citizen, you understand. Then again



I hear nothing. I am very busy in Praha because the Germans do not like me. I refuse to write articles like they want and I am without work, but I have organization to make and I have no time to write to my brother. At last it is too dangerous to remain in Praha and I come to England as refugee. Here I seek my brother and I find he is dead. Your law say he kill himself, but that I not believe. My brother David is not such a man. I know he is killed—murdered, you say—because he refuse to work for Germany any more. Now, I have to find who kill him, but I have little money and I must work. I translate from English to German and Czech for News Agency.”

“Had you ever heard of this man Zimmermann before you met him?” Mr. Wigan asked as Stavrich paused.

“Yes,” Stavrich replied, “when my brother tell me how he make money in London he said that name by error—how is it?—”

“You mean,” Mr. Wigan suggested, “that the name slipped out by mistake.”

“Yes, slipped out by mistake, that is it!” the Czech agreed. “My brother speak of man from Karlsbad and then he say later: ‘Herr Zimmermann.’ ”

“In what connection,” the Superintendent asked, “did he mention Zimmermann’s name?”

“He just say: ‘When you come to London I present you to the people who wish this information, and if Herr Zimmermann is pleased you can also make money.’ Then he say: ‘Forget that name.’ ”

“Did he ever mention,” was Channing’s next question, “having been in contact with any Japanese?”

“No,” Stavrich replied. “He did not mention.”

“How do you know,” Mr. Wigan asked then, “that



this Zimmermann whom you met at Mrs. Richardson's was the same as the Zimmermann mentioned by your brother?"

"I do not know absolutely," the Czech said, "but if he is not, then it is a great—how do you say?—a great with-happening——"

"A coincidence," Mr. Wigan prompted.

"Ah, yes, like in French," Stavrich went on. "A coincidence that he is also a Zimmermann who is of Karlsbad—or say he is of Karlsbad. Also other Czechs in London know this Zimmermann is of the Gestapo."

"Very interesting," Channing commented on this. "Now Mr. Stavrich, would you mind waiting in the corridor for a few minutes?"

Stavrich rose at once and left the room. Channing promptly telephoned to the man in charge of the house exchange at the end of the corridor to see that the Czech did not leave the building.

"Well, Mr. Wigan," he said then. "You've put it across me good and proper. Where did you get this idea that Stavebrook and Stavrich were brothers?"

"Again," Mr. Wigan replied a trifle primly, "it was partly guesswork. You see, I had met Stavebrook and I knew at once that if he was a British subject, it was by naturalization. In that case his name was probably as recent as his nationality. Then when we heard of this foreigner inquiring for him in imperfect English by a name which sounded like 'Staffbricks,' I guessed that it must have been somebody who knew him under his previous name. When, in addition, I learned that this inquirer seemed very much affected at learning of Stavebrook's death I—er—guessed that he must be somebody closely related to him. With the help of Inspector Mulhearn I found this man Stavrich, and when I saw



him I had no doubt whatever about the relationship—the resemblance is so striking. There you have the entire process of—er—ratiocination.”

“Very simple,” Channing laughed. “Just like our old friend Sherlock.”

“Quite so.”

“Now,” the Superintendent resumed, “what do you think? Did this Stavrich fellow kill Zimmermann?”

“I don’t think so,” Mr. Wigan replied. “However, it might not be a bad idea to find out if the story of his day’s doings can be confirmed. The British Museum part should be easy anyhow.”

“Yes, I’ll put a man on to that.”

“I would suggest also,” Mr. Wigan went on, “that we ask Mr. Stavrich to accompany us to the place where he saw Zimmermann go into an office building. I think it would be very interesting to know what offices are in that building.”

“That’s an idea,” Channing agreed. “Let’s do it now.”

Stavrich, called in from the corridor, expressed entire willingness to show them the building in question, and in a few moments they were getting into a police car. Their difficulties began at once, for the Czech was unable to direct them from Whitehall.

“I must,” he said, “go to British Museum first and then I say. From here I not know and also it become dark.”

The police driver wanted to know if their destination was close to the Museum, and to which side of it he wished to go, but this information the Czech was unable to give.

“If you go to British Museum,” he insisted, “I know how I go from there.”

They drove to Great Russell Street and there Stavrich

got his bearings. He directed them through Museum Street and Drury Lane to Aldwych, and from there along Fleet Street.

"Gosh!" the driver grumbled. "Why couldn't he have said Fleet Street at first?"

"Shut up," Channing ordered, and turned to the Czech.

"Did you walk all this way?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," was the reply. "I always walk. It is not far."

Channing, who, though a countryman, had all the born Londoner's aversion to this form of locomotion, made a grimace.

At the entrance to one of the many little courts off Fleet Street, Stavrich asked the driver to pull up.

"It is in there," he said, pointing.

"H'm!" the Superintendent said. "There's something going on in there now."

At the entrance to the court a tall City policeman was standing.

Seeing a car of the sister Metropolitan Force he straightened up. Then he evidently recognized Channing and saluted.

"What's up?" the Superintendent asked.

"A housebreaking, sir," the man replied, "and a young lady seems to be hurt."



## CHAPTER TWELVE

THE SUPERINTENDENT AND HIS two companions entered the narrow passage which widened out into a court round which were printing houses and office buildings. Stavrich pointed out the door, visible from Fleet Street, through which he had seen Zimmermann pass. A policeman stood in front of it now. Channing then thanked the Czech and directed the police driver to take him back to Wandsworth. Then he and Mr. Wigan entered the building. On the second floor they found an office whose door was open and from which they could hear voices. The Superintendent went in, followed by Mr. Wigan. There was a table with a typewriter near the door. Close to it a young man was leaning over a chair holding a glass to the lips of a dishevelled girl. At a desk in disorder stood two men, one in ordinary civilian clothes and the other in the uniform of an inspector of City Police.

"Who are you?" the latter challenged them. "I gave orders nobody was to be let in."

The man with him put his hand on the inspector's arm.

"It's all right," he said. "Don't you know Superintendent Channing of the Special Branch?"

"Oh!" the man in uniform apologized. "Sorry, sir, I didn't recognize you."

"That's all right," Channing said. "This is not my manor, and I didn't expect to find anything like this here. What has happened?"

"Do you mean to say, sir," the plain-clothes man asked, "that you were actually coming to this office?"

"Yes, I believe I was," Channing replied, "but I didn't know it. I see it's supposed to be the office of the 'Anglo-Nordic Press Agency,' and that sounds like what I was looking for. But, what's the trouble?"

"I think we'd better get the young man over there to tell his story," the uniformed inspector replied. "The young lady seems all right now."

"The young man is Mr. Reginald Lennard," the other man added, "and my name, by the way, sir, is Smith. Detective-Inspector Smith."

"Glad to meet you," Channing said, "and I should, if you don't mind, like to hear what Mr. Lennard has to say. It might save a lot of time."

The young man was called over to the desk and asked to repeat his story. He was a well-set-up young fellow in his early twenties.

"I had," he began straight away, "an appointment to meet Miss Parkes at six o'clock. We were going to have a spot of food together before I went off to my drill hall. I'm a Territorial, you see. We were to meet at Blackfriars Tube Station. Miss Parkes was late, but as she is sometimes kept late at the office I didn't think anything of it. I waited for about half an hour and then went off and ate alone. When I finished my meal I thought I'd take a chance and ring up this office to see if she was still here. At first I got no reply and then, just as I was going to hang up, there was a terrific crackling on the phone and I thought I heard Gl—Miss Parkes saying something very faintly. I couldn't make anything of it, however, so I said I was coming round. I walked, but I was delayed a bit in talk with one of the chaps in my battery. I'm sorry for that, but I couldn't know anything was wrong, could I?"



This was said with a sidelong look towards the girl in the chair behind.

"Of course you couldn't," Channing declared emphatically. Clearly the young man had been reproached for his dilatoriness and the Superintendent wanted to help. "Go on, Mr. Lennard."

"When I got here," the young fellow continued, "I found the door of the office not locked—only closed on the latch—so I came in, and the first thing I saw was Gladys—er—Miss Parkes tied in that chair and a gag in her mouth. The telephone was lying on the floor. I undid the cords and called the police. That's all I know, sir."

"I see," Channing replied. "Thanks. And now if Miss Parkes is able, perhaps she'd tell us what happened to her."

Miss Parkes was able. She rose from her chair and came over to the desk smoothing her hair.

"I was sitting typing," she said, "when two men came in and asked for Mr. Zauber."

"Just a moment," Channing stopped her. "What time was this?"

"It was half-past five," the girl replied, "and I was hurrying to finish my work when these men came in. I told them Mr. Zauber was out. One of them came over to this desk and said he would write a note and leave it for him. That brought him behind me, and before I could say a word he had his hand on my mouth. They told me they wouldn't hurt me if I didn't struggle or shout, but I tried to do both. Then they tied me up and they began to search the office from top to bottom. They had keys. They looked like Mr. Zauber's keys, and they opened everything. There was one key they didn't use, though."



"What was that?" the Superintendent asked.

"The key of Mr. Zauber's private safe," the girl replied. "They didn't even find the safe."

"I see no safe here," the inspector in uniform said.

Miss Parkes smiled.

"You're standing on it," she said.

The inspector jumped aside as if he feared an explosion.

He reddened and looked at the floor.

"It's a funny safe," the girl explained. "You lift three boards and it's underneath—a long shallow thing."

While the inspector busied himself with the floorboards, Channing nodded to the girl to continue.

"The men talked German all the time," she went on, "and they seemed angry at not finding more. They were looking for papers, I think, though they took a bundle of pound notes from the centre drawer of the desk, but I'm sure they didn't find what they wanted. Then they went away. One of them then came back and put the telephone on the floor just out of my reach. 'When you kick that over,' he said, 'somebody is sure to come and turn you loose.' When they went I tried to get at the phone, but I couldn't manage it. Then a long time afterwards the phone began to ring. I tried again, and this time I knocked it over with my toe and tried to shout, but I could only make a weird noise. I heard Reg's voice and tried harder and harder, but it was no good. Then Reg came half an hour later and undid me."

"Thanks," Channing said. "Now could you describe these two men?"

"I think so," Miss Parkes replied. "One of them—the one who put the telephone on the floor—was tall and fair and good-looking. He had a grey flannel suit and



brown and white shoes. He spoke English with a sort of American accent. The other was fat and dumpy with thick eyelashes. He was dressed in an ordinary lounge suit—dark grey worsted. He spoke with a German accent when he came in and asked for Mr. Zauber."

"Now, about Mr. Zauber," Channing asked. "How long have you been employed here?"

"Three months," Miss Parkes replied.

"What was the nature of Mr. Zauber's business?"

"Press Agency," was the reply. "He used to collect all the English items which might interest people in Germany and the other northern countries."

"Oh? Then he had a large staff?"

"No, not permanently, anyway. As a matter of fact he used to get most of his material from the English papers. It was part of my job to read them and cut out the paragraphs I thought might interest him."

"I notice," Channing said, "that you qualify your answer about staff. You say 'not permanently.' Now, what does that mean exactly?"

"Oh, I mean he had free lances working for him," the girl replied. "They used to turn in their stuff when they got it, and Mr. Zauber paid them if he thought it was any good."

"Did you know any of these free lances?" the Superintendent asked. "Were they Fleet Street men?"

"No," Miss Parkes told him. "I once told Mr. Zauber that he ought to use Fleet Street men, but he said he preferred men with no preconceived ideas about what makes news."

"Where does Zauber send this news?" was the next question.

"Oh, all over the place. If those men didn't take it there's a card-index thing there with all the addresses."

"Is this it?" the City detective asked, holding up a small drawer.

"Yes, that's it."

"Where does Mr. Zauber live?" Channing asked. "Hasn't he been sent for?"

"We can't find him," Detective-Inspector Smith answered. "Miss Parkes gave us a telephone number, but he is not to be found there. All we can get is that he is not in."

"Would you describe Zauber?" Channing asked Miss Parkes.

Miss Parkes smiled. She was by now completely recovered from the shock of her bondage.

"He is a real German," she said. "One of those you see in caricatures. Fair, with pale blue eyes, a bit tubby, and that funny head coming straight up out of his shoulders."

Mr. Wigan and Channing exchanged glances.

"M'm!" the latter said. "And you don't know where he lives?"

"No," Miss Parkes replied, "but I had the telephone number I gave the inspector. He told me always to ring up there when I wanted him, and to leave a message if he didn't answer in person."

"Did you ever have occasion to do so?"

"Oh, yes, three or four times. He always insisted on being told when any of his free lances turned up."

"Did he reply in person when you did so?"

"Only once. Other times it was somebody else who answered, somebody with a German accent worse than Mr. Zauber's."

"Are you feeling all right now?" Channing asked.

"Oh, yes," the girl replied. "I'm tough."



"I wonder," the Superintendent remarked. "Oh, by the way, have you eaten?"

"No."

Channing turned to young Lennard.

"Take Miss Parkes away and give her something to eat. Then I'd like you to come and see me at Scotland Yard. I'm afraid you'll have to miss your drill to-night, but I think you'll find that this is more important than drill."

"Before you go, miss," the inspector in uniform, on his knees on the floor, said, "tell me how is this thing opened?"

He pointed to a long metal box neatly embedded in the floor under the planks.

"Oh," Miss Parkes replied. "There's some combination which I don't know. That opens the first door, which slides open. Then there's another door under that. It can be opened by Mr. Zauber's key."

"I've never seen a safe like this before," the inspector said. "I don't believe there's a peterman in London could crack it."

"Mr. Zauber says it can't be opened by any burglar," Miss Parkes replied. "And, anyhow, I don't think I can allow you to tamper with it. You see, I am responsible to Mr. Zauber, and——"

"Don't worry, Miss Parkes," Channing interrupted. "I'll see that nothing is touched. Run along now and eat, and come to the Yard, the pair of you, in an hour and a quarter."

When they had left Channing told the two City Police officers enough to indicate the importance he attached to the search of Zauber's office.

"I think Mr. Wigan will agree with me," he concluded, "that Zauber is an important link in our chain."

"Yes," Mr. Wigan declared, "a broken link. Zauber is undoubtedly Zimmermann, and this is his outside contact office for the smaller fry among his spies."

"You're probably right," Channing agreed, "so we'd better have somebody left here until further orders. I suggest that every visitor be detained for questioning."

"That shall be done," Inspector Smith declared, "and this safe, too, will have to be dealt with. It's a foreign make, I see, so we can't appeal to the manufacturers to open it, and I don't know how we're going to tackle it."

"I think I can help there," Mr. Wigan said. "I have a friend—a very trustworthy man—who will be glad to open the safe for you."



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

MR. WIGAN DINED AT Channing's house again that evening and accepted the Superintendent's invitation to spend yet another night in the spare room.

"They've rescued most of your personal stuff," Channing informed him, "and you're welcome if you like to cart the lot down here. It will be a week before the damage to the room is repaired."

Mr. Wigan, however, expressed his desire to move to a hotel on the following day, and the Superintendent did not insist further, though he warned his friend that another attempt on his life might yet be made.

After dinner, Mrs. Channing, who had had a short talk with her husband before the meal, left the men to themselves. The ban on 'shop' thus tacitly lifted, Channing was the first to mention the case which was in the minds of both.

"Well?" he asked. "What do you think of the latest developments, Mr. Wigan?"

"You mean the 'Anglo-Nordic Press Agency' business?" Mr. Wigan said.

"That and other things."

"Oh, I think there's very little to be said," the ex-schoolmaster declared. "The young lady's identification of Zimmermann as Zauber seems to make it obvious that my guess was correct. The Press office was simply a sort of spy clearing office."

"Yes," Channing agreed, "that much certainly is clear, but I was thinking more of Zimmermann's death, though that's not my pigeon. If he was killed I should



like to know why. You see, supposing Stavrich's theory about his brother's death is right, that is to say he was killed because, having refused to spy any more, he might be tempted to tell us or somebody else all he knew—then Zimmermann's death, which was similar in almost every other respect, doesn't seem to make sense."

"Why not?" Mr. Wigan asked.

"Why not?" the Superintendent echoed. "Well, we have your own evidence that Zimmermann was himself interested in closing Mrs. Bible's mouth. Is it likely that he would be suspected of being a babbler himself?"

"Probably not," Mr. Wigan replied, "and I should think that the motive for his death was something quite different. Remember that the manner of that death was not quite identical with the other three. In the first place there was no little piece of paper with the '*Shinin ni kuchi nashi*' warning; then we have no proof that he walked out of a window like the others. He may have been thrown."

"Then," Channing asked, "you have a theory on the matter?"

"No, not exactly a theory," was the reply, "but I have been trying to imagine the various possibilities."

"So have I," the Superintendent said, "but not very successfully. The thing seems topsy-turvy to me."

"It does," Mr. Wigan admitted, "but suppose for instance that Zimmermann was killed by some anti-Nazi organization, wouldn't that explain many things, such as the absence of a warning in Japanese and the absence also of any evidence that he walked out of a window?"

"I don't quite see the relevance of your last point," Channing replied. "The absence of evidence that he *walked* out of a window instead of being thrown out strikes me as entirely unimportant. There simply didn't



happen to be anybody in a position to see what took place."

"Don't you think it rather curious," Mr. Wigan countered, "that there did happen to be somebody at hand in all the other cases to see what took place? In Stavebrook's case there was a girl who always sat typing at a window, and often looked idly out; in Barholm's case there were men working on a cradle opposite—men who had been there for days; then, when we come to Markson, there were the office or shop cleaners—women who always did that job every morning before ordinary working hours."

"When you put it like that," Channing conceded, "there may be something in what you say. It comes to this then: Stavebrook, Barholm and Markson were killed by Zimmermann's crowd to make them keep their mouths shut, and their deaths were deliberately engineered to look like suicide, proof being provided in thoroughly Teutonic fashion by means of eye-witnesses. Zimmermann, on the other hand, suspected of being a member of the Gestapo, was killed by Czechs or some other anti-Nazi crowd who imitated the fellow's own methods, but not knowing about the warnings and the intentional provision of evidence, did not go into such detail. Is that your idea?"

"Oh, I don't say it is my idea," Mr. Wigan replied, "but I put it forward as a possibility. I admit that it is based on insufficient evidence, but it is a working hypothesis."

"M'yes," Channing said after a short pause. "As you say, it doesn't rest on a very firm basis. It leaves out of consideration, for example, the attack on Mrs. Bible and the attempt to blow you sky-high. There was no attempt in either of those cases to disguise the facts."



"That is true," Mr. Wigan agreed, "but Mrs. Bible's case was one of urgency, while in mine—well, you saw for yourself that the Press took it to be just another I.R.A. outrage."

"Well," the Superintendent said, "you've been right so often, Mr. Wigan, that I'm tempted to adopt your theory."

"One of my theories," Mr. Wigan corrected him. "I have others, but they are not ripe enough for discussion. By the way, you never told me whether you had any result from your inquiries in Canada regarding Stavebrook."

"Not yet," Channing replied, "but your finding of the brother makes them unnecessary."

"How is Mrs. Bible? Has she been questioned yet?"

"She is progressing favourably, they say at the hospital, but the doctors won't allow any questioning yet. That old Scot you told me about is looking after her youngster."

"And Markson? Have you found out anything about him?"

"Not a thing. Nobody seems to know where he came from. He had a lot of business friends and acquaintances, but they know nothing about the personal side of his life. He bobbed up suddenly about five years ago in London and began to make a living in a very curious way. He trotted about, mainly in the suburbs, looking at big houses which appeared to be easily convertible into flats. When he found a likely one he went to the owner and made an offer for it, and if they agreed on a price he got a written option to purchase at that price. With this option in his pocket he then went to a builder or some such interested party and offered it for sale, for, say, fifty pounds. He did so well at this buying and



selling without putting down any money that he was able very soon to buy house property on his own account. The converted flat market, however, petered out when all these mansion flats began to appear, and I think Markson felt the draught, for, two years ago, he took on a number of agencies for firms abroad. That would, perhaps, explain why he got into contact with our Nazi friends. Anyhow, that's all we know about him."

"He was a Jew, wasn't he?"

"Yes, I think so, though he was some sort of Christian by religion. Why?"

"I am going to make another guess," Mr. Wigan said with a smile, "or rather a suggestion; namely, that Markson was man enough to refuse to work any more for the Nazis when they began their intensive anti-Jew drive. It would be interesting to know whether the cessation of his activities coincided with the beginning of the anti-Jew campaign."

Channing thought for a moment.

"By Jove, I believe you're right," he said then. "It was about that time when our fellows reported that he wasn't visiting the Duke of York Steps any more."

"I see. What a pity we don't know more about the man!" Mr. Wigan reflected. "And now, what about your motor driver—or drivers?"

"That is an interesting point," the Superintendent replied. "One of my chaps told me to-day that he was convinced that the driver of the Daimler and the lorry owner were one and the same person. He said he thought he was on his track."

"Good!" Mr. Wigan approved. "I am glad to hear that, because practically speaking that man seems to be the only personal link with two out of those three deaths."



"Very possibly," Channing added, "with all three, for we have a report from the local police that about an hour before Markson's death a car was seen to drive up to that unfinished building in Hanwell. Two or three men—the informant was not sure—went into the building and the car drove back towards London. The chauffeur answered to the description of the lorry driver."

"And what about that spike in the road?" Mr. Wigan asked.

"You were right about that, too," the Superintendent replied. "It was moved from where the watchman had put it. The man claims that he was on the spot all night and says he can't imagine who moved it unless it was done during the day in full view of everybody."

"It is quite possible that it was," Mr. Wigan said. "Nobody would pay any attention if they saw a man fooling about with the barrier so long as he did it with the air of a man who has a right to be there."

"All the same," Channing declared with a shake of his head, "I'm not satisfied about that watchman. He says, for instance, that he didn't leave his hut until eight o'clock. Now Markson walked off that balcony at ten minutes past eight. The report says that a car stopped and deposited passengers an hour earlier, which makes it about ten or fifteen minutes past seven. Yet the watchman didn't see it. I've asked the local police to put him through the mill about that."

"Yes, there certainly seems to be something strange there," Mr. Wigan replied. "It is very aggravating not to have——"

"Every case is aggravating, Mr. Wigan," the Superintendent interrupted, "but those which come to a dozen dead ends are the worst. This is one of that sort."



"Have you entirely lost trace of the people who approached Barholm's nephew?" Mr. Wigan asked.

"We never got on to their trail," Channing replied. "The young fellow's injuries have prevented anything in the way of an identification test, but I hope he will soon be fit enough to have a look through our albums."

The two men talked on with many repetitions and digressions until nearly midnight. They had reached no conclusions except that it was time for bed when the telephone in the hall burst out into rhythmic ringing.

"Now what?" the Superintendent asked of nobody in particular as he went out to answer the call.

Mr. Wigan, in spite of the open door, could not make out what was the subject of the conversation, for Channing was laconic in his replies.

"Yes, speaking," he began and, after a silence: "You're sure of his identity? M'm! —How far away is that? I see. Well, there's nothing we can do to-night. All right! Good night!"

He came back then.

"Another dead end," he said. "In fact another dead man."

"Indeed?" Mr. Wigan asked, "Who is it this time?"

"The man we were talking about a few minutes ago," was the reply, "the night watchman. He was fished out of the Grand Union Canal near Langley in Bucks."

"Then he evidently did know something," Mr. Wigan said.

"Or somebody thought he did," Channing added. "Well, that's just another possible source of information closed. I'm afraid we shall have to hope for the best from the opening of Zimmermann's safe. Have you arranged with your Scotch friend to have a go at it?"

"Yes, at ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

"I hope you were careful not to attract anybody's attention to the man," Channing said.

"Unless he himself talks—and he won't—nobody will know anything," Mr. Wigan replied.

"Will you men please go to bed," came a voice from the upper floor.

Both men looked at the clock on the mantelpiece, and then, with a smile, at each other.

"Coming, my dear," the Superintendent called in reply.

"It certainly is time for bed," Mr. Wigan said and rose to his feet.

"Yes," Channing agreed, "but before you go I ought to tell you that I had a number of people to view Zimmermann's body—the porters from the offices in Victoria Street and High Holborn and your caretaker friend from Acton. The Victoria Street chap didn't recognize him, but the other two did. The High Holborn man remembers seeing him go up in the lift on the day of Barholm's death, but he doesn't know exactly where he went, and the Acton man identified him as one of the men who questioned him about Stavebrook."



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

**A**T TEN O'CLOCK ON the following morning the Superintendent and Mr. Wigan met the City detective at the office of the Anglo-Nordic Press Agency. A few minutes later the heavy footsteps of Mr. Sanders were heard on the uncarpeted stairs, and the Scot appeared, followed by another man who carried a heavy bag which clanked as he laid it down thankfully on the landing.

"Guid morning, Mr. Wigan," Sanders greeted the only person known to him. "I'm at your sairvice, and the firm has asked me to say that all its resources are at the disposal of the law."

After this little speech he looked inquiringly at the others. Mr. Wigan introduced the two senior police officers.

"From what Mr. Wigan has been telling me," the Scot said then, "I'm thinking I may need the help of a couple of strong men."

"I have two constables in the other room," the City detective told him, "and we're all ready to lend a hand."

"That's guid," Sanders said. "Now, where's the safe?"

A moment later the floor-boards were pulled up. Sanders looked at the blue steel surface thus revealed and then stooped to run his hand over it.

"Ayel!" he said. "It's a nice job. A special orrder, I'm thinking. A pity to spoil it."

"If there's no other way," Channing remarked, "I'm afraid it will have to be spoiled."

"Well," the safe expert declared, "we'll have to get it out of there."

The safe was not large, but two large City policemen, the inspector and Sanders' assistant, were sweating when it had been lifted from its receptacle, which, as they now saw, had been specially prepared and reinforced for it.

Sanders immediately set to work. The others watched, fascinated, as the Scot tried every means at his disposal to open the safe. The combination lock, however, was proof against every form of persuasion, and the silent assistant at a nod from Sanders connected up an electric drill with the office mains supply. A moment later the whirr of the instrument began. Patiently the expert tried every apparently vulnerable spot while the other man busied himself with two small cylinders from his bulky kit. To the noise was soon joined the white heat of this apparatus. For over an hour they worked without a word. At last Sanders stood up wiping his forehead.

"I can't do it," he announced. "Man, it's a lovely piece of work."

The City inspector's expression was evidence that he, at any rate, was incapable of taking this professionally admiring view.

"Do you mean to say you can't open it?" he asked.

"It's what I say," Sanders replied with a smile, "and I assure you, sir, I mean it."

"Then," Channing asked, "what do you suggest, Mr. Sanders? It's very important that we get the thing open."

"There's only one thing to do," Sanders said, "and that's to cart the whole thing to our works. We've got the equipment there that'll do it."

"You'd better arrange for that to be done," Channing said to the inspector.



The inspector nodded and went to the telephone. While he was speaking Channing stepped over to the desk beside which Mr. Wigan was standing.

"Do you want to go to the works?" he asked. "I shall be there and I can give you a lift."

"No, I don't think so," Mr. Wigan replied. "I had thought of going to look at my rooms and if necessary to book a room at an hotel."

"You're welcome to stay with us," Channing told him. "However, if——"

"Thanks," Mr. Wigan interrupted, "but I think I should be close to my rooms while they are being repaired."

"Don't forget," Channing warned him, "to let me know your address."

"Oh," Mr. Wigan said, "I shall probably take a room at the Lamorna Hotel, just round the corner from my place. If I go elsewhere I shall certainly let you know."

To the Superintendent's surprise the ex-schoolmaster began to pick up from the desk various papers which lay there—papers which might fitly have been thrown into the waste-paper basket—and to stuff them into his pockets, making untidy bulges to right and left.

"What the devil are you doing that for?" Channing asked. "That's only a lot of junk."

"I shall find a use for it," Mr. Wigan replied with a smile, and took his leave.

He went by taxi to his rooms. His landlady seemed anxious to talk to him about the explosion, but he edged past her up the stairs with a mumbled excuse that he was in a hurry.

"I left your letters on the table on the landing, Mr. Wigan," the woman told him then, "and anything that's

usable you'll find in the wardrobe in the back room. I sorted them out for you."

"Thank you, Mrs. Gurney," Mr. Wigan replied. "That was very kind of you."

Workmen were busy in the wrecked room. He peered in.

"Morning, sir," one of the men said. "A proper mess they made of this place, didn't they?"

"Yes, indeed," Mr. Wigan agreed.

Then in a corner he saw something.

"Well, well," he exclaimed, "my tobacco jar! How strange! Absolutely unbroken!"

"I knew a chap," the other workman said, "what was two yards away when a 'igh explosive shell burst, and it didn't as much as rumple 'is 'air."

"Quite possible!" Mr. Wigan said absent-mindedly, and picked up his jar.

A few minutes later he was on his way with a packed suitcase to the Lamorna Hotel. He was obviously known there, for the proprietor greeted him by name and allotted a room to him immediately. Before arranging anything else in the room, Mr. Wigan placed his precious tobacco jar on the mantelpiece and proceeded to empty his side pockets of the papers he had taken from Zauber's office. These he heaped on the bedside table. He sat down on the side of his bed and began to write a few words on four or five consecutive pages of a loose-leaf notebook. Detaching the pages he put them in the side pocket of his coat. Then, without bothering to unpack, he went down to the one lounge which the small hotel boasted and wrote a letter on the notepaper there provided. This also he put into the side pocket of his coat. Then, choosing a comfortable armchair, he buried himself in its depths and closed his eyes.



He opened them half an hour later to find the hotel porter shaking him with gentle persistence.

"Yes?" he said. "What is it?"

"A gentleman to see you, sir," the porter replied.

"Did he give a name?" Mr. Wigan asked.

"No, sir," the man told him, "he just asked for you, sir, and said to tell you he came from Mr. Channing."

Mr. Wigan looked round the lounge and saw that it was for the moment unoccupied by any other resident.

"Then," he said, "show him in."

A moment later a tall, fair young man with a silky blonde moustache was before him.

"Mr. Wigan?" he asked.

"Yes. What can I do for you?" Mr. Wigan replied.

"I have come," the other replied very precisely, "from Mr. Channing. He would like you to come along to see him."

"Where? Why didn't he telephone?"

The young man smiled.

"There is no telephone in the house where he is now," he replied, "and as he cannot leave he asked me to see you in person. You see, sir, he thought you would probably distrust a telephone call from a person whose voice you did not know."

"He was quite right," Mr. Wigan said crisply, "but what reason have I to trust you, young man?"

The young man laughed.

"None, sir," he answered cheerfully, "but I can produce proof of my *bona fides*."

"Oh, yes, of course, your warrant card!" Mr. Wigan said. "Well, young man, I am of a suspicious nature and I should like to see it."

"Oh," the visitor replied, "I am not a police officer exactly, but perhaps this will satisfy you?"

He presented a small green card. Mr. Wigan took it and read it.

"Ah!" he said, "I see. Mr. G. Watson, of M.I.5. That's different."

He gave back the card to its owner.

"Where does Mr. Channing wish me to meet him?" he asked then.

"At a house in Palmers Green," was the reply. "Certain information he received this morning led him there. He thought you might like to be with him there. I don't know details, sir, but I gather that he has found something very interesting there."

Mr. Wigan looked at his watch.

"It is really time for lunch," he said, "but I suppose I had better go. Just sit down while I go up and get my hat and oh, yes, my tobacco. I shall only be a minute."

Mr. Wigan bustled off towards the door but stopped half-way.

"Oh," he asked, "how are we going? By taxi or by Underground?"

"I have a department car outside," the young man replied. "That will be much faster than a taxi."

"Good!" Mr. Wigan approved, and continued on his way.

Before going up to his room, however, he went out to the front door of the hotel and looked at a black car which stood there. He saw that there was a man seated bolt upright at the wheel. In his room he added a word or two to the notes he had written on the loose pages of his notebook and to the letter he had written in the lounge. The letter he placed in his tobacco jar.

A minute later he was back in the lounge hatted and carrying a stick. He was smoking a pipe.



"I am ready," he announced.

The young man escorted him deferentially out to the black car. The chauffeur opened the door to the seat beside him, but said nothing. Mr. Wigan ignored the implied invitation and opened the rear door.

"Wouldn't you like to sit in front?" the young man asked.

"I should dislike it very much," Mr. Wigan declared. "I never sit beside the driver of a car."

"Oh, very well," the other said, and himself took the front seat after a moment's hesitation.

The car headed northward through side streets until they reached the Finchley Road. Mr. Wigan was smoking as if he had not tasted tobacco for weeks, emitting clouds of smoke. After some minutes of this the driver began to cough and to draw his companion's attention by gestures which clearly expressed annoyance. At the junction with the North Circular Road, when they slowed down in obedience to a traffic signal, the ex-schoolmaster seemed to notice for the first time the inconvenience he was thus causing.

"Oh," he exclaimed, "I'm terribly sorry. My smoking annoys you. Perhaps I'd better get some air in."

Without awaiting any reply he lowered the window on the near side just as they came level with a policeman who was standing on the pavement, and knocked out the dottle of his pipe practically on that officer's shiny boots. The constable looked at him severely, and then stared at his own feet. A coin wrapped in a piece of paper had fallen together with the spent tobacco.

As the green light gave the signal to move on Mr. Wigan did not see the subsequent actions of the policeman, nor did he try to do so, for the young man seated

beside the driver had turned round and was looking at him. Mr. Wigan smiled.

"Very inconsiderate of me," he said. "I don't smoke very much, but when I do I'm afraid I am not fit for decent company."

"That's all right, sir," was the reply. "I understand. But wouldn't you like to close your window now? The air has cleared now."

"Oh, I rather like the feel of the outside air," Mr. Wigan said. "If you don't mind I will keep it open for a little longer—unless, of course, it inconveniences you or the driver."

The driver uttered an inarticulate grunt.

"Oh, no," the other man said, "I don't mind."

He turned back and looked ahead. Thus it was that he did not see Mr. Wigan flick another coin wrapped in paper as they passed a traffic policeman farther on, and a third which hit a postman who was crossing the road.

They drove on in silence until the driver suddenly uttered an exclamation and the car jumped forward, throwing Mr. Wigan violently against the back cushion, so that he did not hear the sharp question of his young escort nor the reply. Whatever these were, the car reverted to the normal speed of a minute before.

"Goodness gracious!" Mr. Wigan asked then, "what happened?"

"Oh, nothing," the young man replied, "a silly pedestrian, that's all."

Now Mr. Wigan knew that there had been no pedestrian on that stretch of road. He looked through the rear window but saw nothing, and turned forward just in time to see another black car driving alongside, dangerously close to their offside mudguards. Then the familiar sound of a gong came to his ears and the car



beside them shot ahead showing on the rear curtain the word: "Police."

"My goodness!" Mr. Wigan exclaimed, "we have been gonged! Surely we haven't been exceeding the speed limit."

The young man beside the driver was now pale. He did not reply. The driver also seemed frightened out of all proportion.

"What to do?" he asked in a thick guttural voice.

"Stop, of course," Mr. Wigan said. "What else?"

"Yes, yes, stop," the young man confirmed.

The driver obeyed and pulled up directly opposite Bounds Green Underground station. The police car also stopped and then backed until it was beside theirs, and a policeman leaned out.

"Is one of you Mr. Wigan?" he asked.

"I am Mr. Wigan," the owner of the name replied. "What is wrong?"

"That's for you to tell us," the policeman said. "You sent a m— Here! What's the— Bill, stop them!"

The driver and the polite young man who sat beside him had suddenly jumped out and were sprinting for the entrance to the Underground station. The policeman addressed as Bill ran after them. The other left the car and came to Mr. Wigan's window.

"What is it all about?" he asked.

"Young man," Mr. Wigan replied angrily, "you have simply put your foot in it very effectively."

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE OTHER POLICEMAN RETURNED to the car a minute later.

"They got away," he announced. "Just got into a train as the doors were shutting. Let's get a message in."

"Wait a minute," his colleague stopped him as he was about to don his headphones. "Seems we've put our foot in it somehow. This gentleman——"

"I don't care," the other interrupted. "Nobody's going to get away from me like that. Hop in."

"What about *him*?" the driver asked.

"He'd better come, too. I'll send word to pick up this car," was the reply.

Mr. Wigan promptly entered the police car.

"Where to?" the driver inquired.

The other policeman interrupted his call long enough to say:

"Turnpike Lane station. Too late for Wood Green."

"My suggestion is," Mr. Wigan said, "that you stay where we are."

Both men in blue looked at him as if he had been guilty of uttering an unseemly word in church, and the car moved off.

Mr. Wigan sat back and said no more until the policeman called Bill had finished with his headphones.

"Now," he said calmly, "will you kindly tell me why you acted in such a silly fashion?"

"What do you mean—silly fashion?" Bill retorted indignantly. "Didn't you drop a note to a P.C. on the Finchley Road?"



Mr. Wigan fished out of his coat pocket one of the loose leaves which still remained there.

"Yes," he replied, "and that message read as follows: 'Get police car to follow this car and report its destination to Superintendent Channing, Special Branch, telling him that Mr. Wigan dropped this message.' At the bottom I added in pencil the registration number of the car we have just left."

"Well? What about it?" the policeman asked. "We followed the car, didn't we? And we got you safe and sound out of the hands of those crooks. Who are they anyway?"

"Not so fast," Mr. Wigan replied. "I asked that the car be followed—not stopped. It was of the utmost importance that Mr. Channing should know where those men have their headquarters."

"How was I to know that?" the policeman said.

"Here we are!" the driver announced. "Turnpike Lane!"

"Perfectly useless," Mr. Wigan said. "One of those two men is intelligent—too intelligent to remain in the train as far as this."

"What?" Bill asked. "You think they hopped out at Wood Green?"

"Yes, I think they hopped out at Wood Green," Mr. Wigan replied in his driest schoolmasterly tone, "and hopped in again—to the next train returning to Bounds Green, where they will find a car which you left conveniently there for them."

The policemen stared at Mr. Wigan and at each other.

"I'll bet Mr. Wigan's right, Bill," the driver said. "Gosh! We'll get hell for this!"

"That would not surprise me," Mr. Wigan said.

"Still," Bill decided, "I'm going to see if they've seen anything here. I told a London Transport chap to phone along the line."

Mr. Wigan remained in the car while both men went into the station.

It was not long before they returned to him with long faces.

"I'm afraid you were right, Mr. Wigan," the driver said. "Where do you want to go now?"

"I want my lunch," Mr. Wigan replied. "In fact I shall do something desperate unless I get it soon."

"They do a very good lunch at that big pub near Bounds Green station," Bill suggested. "We'll drive you there. And—er—we can see if that car has been moved."

That question was quickly settled. The car was not where they had left it.

"Perhaps," the driver said hopefully, "our people drove it off."

There was soon clear evidence that he was wrong, for as Mr. Wigan was getting out to the wide pavement another police car drove up, and he stood while an exchange of compliments took place. From this it was clear that the second car had just come to take charge of the missing vehicle in reply to Bill's request. He left the policemen to condole with one another and went in to lunch.

After that meal, which did not belie Bill's recommendation, Mr. Wigan decided to telephone Channing. He had not much hope of finding him in his office at that hour, but it was the Superintendent's voice which roared a "Hallo!" in reply to his own.

"This is Wigan speaking," he announced.

"Wha-a-at!" the reply came. "Mr. Wigan? Where are



you? What has happened? How did you get to a phone?"

"Oh, dear, dear," Mr. Wigan complained. "What a number of questions! Which shall I answer first?"

"Where are you?" Channing asked, more calmly.

"In a telephone booth at Bounds Green Underground station," Mr. Wigan replied precisely.

"How the dickens did you get there? I thought you were at High Barnet."

"I have not been near High Barnet," the ex-schoolmaster told him. "There must be some——"

He heard the exasperated muttering at the other end of the wire.

"Somebody's mad," Channing shouted then, "and I don't know who it is. Stay there and I'll come and pick you up."

Without waiting for a reply the Superintendent hung up the receiver, and Mr. Wigan left the booth, feeling that he was now compelled to await his friend's arrival.

Channing's car drove up in less time than he had thought it possible.

"I'll have to have you locked up, Mr. Wigan," the Superintendent greeted Mr. Wigan as the latter joined him. "Now, you've spoiled everything."

"Really?" Mr. Wigan replied, wondering what had happened. "How have I done that?"

"By escaping from that house," Channing explained. "They'll be wise to us now and——"

"I really don't know what you are talking about, Mr. Channing," Mr. Wigan interrupted sharply. "I have escaped from no house and I have not the——"

It was now Channing's turn to interrupt.

"What the hell is taking place to-day?" he said, apparently to the back of his chauffeur. "Has the whole Force gone completely mad?"

"A small portion of it," Mr. Wigan declared, "has certainly been acting extremely foolishly."

The Superintendent regained his equanimity with an effort.

"It's no good abusing each other," he said. "Just tell me what you've been up to. What's all this about anyway?"

Mr. Wigan told the tale of his morning's adventures in as few words as possible.

"How did you know that fellow was—" the Superintendent began, but stopped. "However, that's for later. What I want to know is how I got a report saying that a car bearing the registration number you gave to a traffic constable on the North Circular Road was followed to a house in High Barnet?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Mr. Wigan replied, "unless the car in which I was travelling was picked up by another police car after leaving Bounds Green."

"I sincerely hope so," Channing declared.

On their return to Scotland House, however, they discovered that it was far otherwise. A raiding party which had been dispatched by the Superintendent had returned with the report that they had interrupted in the middle of lunch a family party consisting of a perfectly blameless retired major-general and his wife and children, and that nothing suspicious was to be seen at the house in High Barnet. In the garage there was indeed a Morris car bearing the registration number given by Mr. Wigan in his note. In it were still the parcels brought back by Mrs. Major-General after her morning's shopping.



"Was your car a Morris?" Channing asked Mr. Wigan at this stage of the report.

"Oh, no," Mr. Wigan replied. "It was a particularly efficient Rolls-Bentley. I took note of that. Obviously my young friend adopted, whether by deliberate choice or otherwise, a registration number already in existence and by a curious coincidence that car was followed as well as mine."

"No damned coincidence about it!" Channing growled.

The Superintendent was in a bad humour now and as often happens he visited it not only on those who were its cause but also on those who were not directly concerned. There was a stinging telephone message to the officer in charge of motor patrols which would undoubtedly be passed on with interest to Bill and his colleague. Then Channing turned on Mr. Wigan.

"It's you I blame, more than them, Mr. Wigan," he said. "Why the dickens did you have to set out on an adventure like that—and without giving me any notice of what you were going to do?"

"Now, be reasonable," Mr. Wigan retorted. "In the first place I was hardly a free agent, was I? And, then, suppose I had told you beforehand what I expected to happen, would you have taken me seriously?"

"That's true," Channing admitted. "I mightn't have taken you seriously. On the other hand I might. However, we'll say no more about that. What I don't understand—and you haven't made it clear to me—is how you actually knew what was going to happen?"

"That is not difficult to explain," Mr. Wigan told him. "When we left your house this morning a young man followed us. The same young man was outside the offices of the Anglo-Nordic when we were inside. That,



I think, was enough to make one suspect that we were under observation. I decided, therefore, to try and draw the watchers off you as I didn't want them to know that we had failed to open the safe. That is why I stuffed my pockets with papers. It was bait. When I again saw that young man outside my rooms I knew that I had guessed correctly. He followed me—very circumspectly. it is true, but I saw him—to the Hotel Lamorna. I wondered what action he would take, and considered the different possibilities. My idea then was that he would endeavour to book a room in the hotel and make an attempt to get the papers, but thanks to the threat on my life—for I presume the Japanese proverb to be a threat—I came to the added conclusion that an attack of some kind would be made on my own person. That is why I wrote a letter which, as agreed, I put in my tobacco jar, and which you have presumably read."

"Good Lord!" Channing exclaimed. "*I am* an ass! I forgot all about the tobacco jar. ~~Even if~~ I had remembered it I probably would have ~~thought~~ it had got smashed in your explosion."

"No, it survived," Mr. Wigan resumed. "So that was a wasted effort. Well, I wrote that letter and also a number of notes calculated to give you a clue to my whereabouts if I were able to dispose of them. You see, I had envisaged something in the nature of a kidnapping since I was determined to stay in the public rooms of the hotel as a precaution against violence there, but I must say I did not foresee the actual method. That was clever, though I consider that it was very careless of that young man to give me the opportunity of seeing the registration number of his car as it waited outside the hotel."



"How did you know the fellow wasn't an M.I.5 man?" Channing asked. "He might have been, you know."

"That is true," Mr. Wigan replied. "I have never seen an M.I.5 identity card, but you must admit that it was very improbable that a young man who had been following me all morning could have come with a message from you. Then, again, I knew that if you really had to send for me you would send one of your own men. Better still, Mr. Channing, I knew perfectly well that you would not feel called upon to send for me at all. I have no illusions about my value to you."

Channing laughed, now restored to good humour.

"Oh, I don't know," he said, "you're a help, Mr. Wigan, you're a help."

"Indeed? May I ask if the safe has been opened?"

"Yes, and what do you think was in it?"

"I have no idea. Probably nothing."

"Oh, there was plenty," Channing declared. "Several thousand pounds in bank notes and this book."

He took from his drawer a book bound in typical Japanese fashion, covered with a silk wrapper which was fastened by ivory tags. The title of the book, however, was in English. It was: *We Japanese*.

Mr. Wigan took it and removed the stiff wrapper. He looked at the title page, read the introduction, then looked at the index, after which he turned rapidly to a page half-way through the book. He laughed.

"So," he said, "that's where he got it!"

"Got what?" Channing asked.

"The proverb. Look!"

Mr. Wigan passed the book back to the Superintendent, holding it open at the page he was reading. Channing looked at the heading.

"Some Japanese Proverbs!" he read, and then looking

farther down at the spot indicated by the ex-school-master where a line in Japanese was marked by a cross in red ink at either end. "The Dead Have No Mouths," was the translation given underneath.

He looked up.

"Then," he said, "you think there's no Japanese involved in this at all?"



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"PROBABLY NOT," MR. WIGAN replied. "You see, this is a book published by an enterprising Japanese hotel proprietor for European visitors. It is a collection of odds and ends about Japan compiled from material he used to print on the backs of his menu cards. Anybody can get hold of it."

"That may be," Channing said, "but why did these murdering devils use that proverb out of it?"

"I don't know," Mr. Wigan answered with a twinkle, "unless it was to make things more difficult for poor Special Branch officers."

"What about the Chinese or Japanese your landlady saw and——"

"That," Mr. Wigan replied, "seems to be a bit of Teutonic thoroughness."

"I don't understand it at all," the Superintendent said. "Why should they try to put the blame on the Japanese? The Japanese are their allies."

"I don't suppose that mattered to them," the ex-schoolmaster declared. "After all, what is an alliance—or a treaty? The Germans are supplying arms to China."

Channing threw the book down on his desk.

"Well," he said, "that's that. Anyhow, we've got this money. We can trace that! A lot of the notes are big ones—fivers and tenners and the like. If we trace them to any particular person we can——"

"You can't," Mr. Wigan interrupted, "do anything. I am convinced that you will find that the notes have been sent from this country to some bank in Germany

and that Zimmermann got them from there either directly or indirectly."

Channing grunted.

"You're probably right," he said, "and it means that we are where we were before."

"Oh, no," Mr. Wigan demurred. "We are not where we were before. Surely the fact that I have met two of the people we want face to face advances us somewhat."

"How?" Channing asked. "You will probably never get a second look at them."

"Possibly not," the ex-schoolmaster admitted, "but on the other hand I may. If I know anything of the Teutonic race, they will not rest until they have put me out of the way."

"You take it very calmly," the Superintendent said with a smile. "Supposing they do have another go at you, what do you propose to do?"

Mr. Wigan also smiled.

"I'm afraid," he replied, "I shall have to waive my objections to what you called police protection."

"I'm glad of that," Channing said.

"But," Mr. Wigan went on, "I want an invisible escort. It's no good giving me somebody who will tread on my heels all the time. My proposal is this: that you give me a man who will keep within sight—near enough to see me if I give a signal, but not so near that third parties might guess that he is my shadow. We shall have to agree upon a code of signals—one gesture, for example, to indicate that I recognize a man as one of to-day's gang, another that I want to speak to my escort, and yet another that I shall need help. And so on."

"Yes," Channing said slowly, "that seems all right."



It means immobilizing a man, and I haven't got an army corps, you know."

Mr. Wigan laughed.

"Believe me," he said, "your man will not be immobilized. He will have to be mobile in every sense of the word. However, I see your point. I would suggest in reply that the man attached to me has as good a chance of catching a member of this gang as any other man you have."

"There's something in that," Channing agreed. "We'd better see about it at once."

After a few words on the house telephone with one of his inspectors, a young fellow whose appearance suggested anything but a policeman came up to the Superintendent's room. A minute sufficed to explain to this newcomer—who was introduced to Mr. Wigan as "Detective Dalrymple, commonly known as 'Dally' "—what was required, and at the end of a quarter of an hour a complete code of signals had been devised to meet every conceivable emergency.

"When do I begin, sir?" Dalrymple asked.

Channing looked at Mr. Wigan.

"Now," the latter said. "These people might be great believers in 'lightning warfare.' It would not surprise me if I were followed on leaving the building."

The Superintendent looked at the young detective.

"Well, young fellow," he said grimly, "you've got a responsible job on your hands. I leave the method to you, but God help you—for nobody else will—if any harm comes to Mr. Wigan."

"Now, now, Mr. Channing," Mr. Wigan protested. "The boy can do no more than his best, and if any harm does come to me I'm sure it won't be his fault. It will probably be mine."



"Thank you, sir," Detective Dalrymple said. "I shall certainly try not to fail you. May I suggest, sir, if you are leaving that you give me time to leave the building by another door. I should like to be outside before you."

"Certainly," Mr. Wigan agreed. "I shall be here for five minutes at least."

"Have you," he asked when the detective had left, "heard anything more from your man who is following up the question of the lorry driver and the man who hired the Daimler?"

"No, not yet. Why?"

"I have an idea," Mr. Wigan replied, "that he may be on the wrong track. I don't think they are one and the same man. It occurred to me that the lorry driver was the man who drove that car this morning. He sat at the wheel like a man who is accustomed to sit on a higher seat and his general demeanour was more that of a lorry driver. It is difficult to explain, but perhaps you know what I mean."

"Yes, I think so," Channing said. "There is a difference of attitude between the fellow who is perched above a lorry driving wheel and the man who is used to sitting behind the wheel of a private car. Is that it?"

"Precisely."

"Well," Channing commented, "it may be a point, but we have no record of the attitude of the car driver—or that of the lorry driver for that matter."

"You forget," Mr. Wigan contradicted, "that the man who hired the Daimler sat at the wheel as if he had driven Daimlers all his life."

"That's true," Channing agreed, "but it doesn't prove anything."

"No? Perhaps not, but do you by any chance remember the names of the lorry and the car drivers?"



"Not offhand," the Superintendent replied. "Why?"

"Oh, nothing. I do remember," Mr. Wigan replied. "The Daimler driver was Richard Dearmer and the lorry driver was Herbert Manners. Now, it is interesting that the name on that M.I.5 identity card was Richard Manners."

"First name of one and last name of the other," Channing said. "Why didn't you say so before? Here, sit over there, Mr. Wigan, and write out a description of those two men."

"Very good," Mr. Wigan replied, and obeyed.

A few minutes later he handed a sheet of paper to the Superintendent who read what he had written.

"What's this?" he said after a few seconds. "You've described them both as if they were twins."

"Not exactly," Mr. Wigan declared, "but you have before you an example of how improbable it is that a man may be recognized from a verbal description. Those men were absolutely unlike, yet the same description of their build and features fits both. The only difference is that the driver had a surgical scar on the back of his neck, and that there was a general air of coarseness about him that the other lacked."

"Then, you don't consider these descriptions very helpful?"

"Not very," Mr. Wigan replied, "but they suggest to me the reason why your detective thinks the Daimler hirer and the lorry driver to be one and the same."

"You mean," Channing asked, "that the other was the fellow who drove the Daimler?"

"I mean," Mr. Wigan said, "that he *may* have been the Daimler driver, but I must really go. I am keeping that poor Detective—er—Dally—er—dilly-dallying."



"That's his job," Channing growled. "I want to know what you're driving at?"

"Oh, nothing," the ex-schoolmaster replied with an air of innocence. "I am merely drawing your attention to the fact that of the two men whom I saw this morning one was what is commonly called a gentleman and the other was not."

"Well? What of it?"

"Nothing, perhaps, but it might not be a bad idea if you found out whether there had been any arrivals at the place you would probably call a certain Embassy since just before Stavebrook's death and whether any such newly arrived person answers that description and speaks perfect English."

"I wish I knew what's in the back of your mind, Mr. Wigan," Channing said. "However, I'll have inquiries made."

"Good! Now, I shall go and give Mr. Dally some exercise."

On reaching the Embankment Mr. Wigan looked neither to right nor left, but headed straight for the Underground entrance. On reaching the platform he allowed three trains to pass in order to give Dalrymple a chance to overtake him. Then he pursued his journey back to the Hotel Lamorna. As he passed the reception desk the girl there called him over.

"There's a lady, a Mrs. Baumeister," she told him, "just come to-day who's been asking the page-boy to point you out to her, Mr. Wigan. I thought I ought to let you know. The boy thought it sounded funny and asked me what he should do. What shall I tell him? I know the proprietor wouldn't wish you to be annoyed in any way, but he's away to-day, and——"

"That's all right, my dear," Mr. Wigan interrupted.



"I can't imagine who the lady can be, but tell the boy to point me out to her. In return just ask him to point her out to me and let me know what room she has."

"She is in 265," the girl told him, "directly above you. I'll tell the boy to tell you who she is."

"Indeed? Well, thank you, my dear."

As he left the desk he caught a glimpse of Detective Dalrymple making his way unobtrusively to the lounge. He strolled along in the same direction. Half a dozen residents and others were seated in the room. He chose a seat near a window and took up a paper. A few minutes later the page came up to him with a letter on a tray.

"Mr. Wigan, sir?" he asked.

"Yes," Mr. Wigan replied and took the letter.

Inside the envelope was a note scribbled in a boyish hand.

*The lady, he read, is the one in a grey dress in the far corner. Shall I tell her you are here?*

"No reply," Mr. Wigan said aloud, and then in a low tone, "Yes, my boy, you may tell her."

He put a shilling on the tray. The boy grinned delightedly.

"But don't tell her I know," Mr. Wigan ended.

"Oh, no, sir. Thank you, sir."

When the boy had left him the ex-schoolmaster moved over to a writing table as if to reply to the letter he had just received. Out of the tail of his eye he saw the page talking to the woman in grey in the far corner.

On his way back to his previous seat a minute later, Mr. Wigan passed the armchair where Dalrymple was lolling comfortably behind a newspaper. He stumbled

over the detective's outstretched legs most artistically, and apologized, listening in turn to Dalrymple's excuses for taking up so much room. When equilibrium had been restored and Mr. Wigan had resumed his seat, the detective was unrolling a wad of paper which had appeared in his ash-tray.



## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

MR. WIGAN WONDERED WHAT form the attack would take this time, for he was convinced that the woman who had registered as Mrs. Baumeister was an emissary of the gang responsible for the deaths of several people. From the fact that a woman had been chosen he was almost sure that ruse not violence would be the method employed. True to his declared policy of exposing himself as bait, he decided to remain in the hotel and to give Mrs. Baumeister every opportunity of approaching him. He was confident of his own ability to make her show her hand, and thanks to the instructions deposited in Detective Dalrymple's ash-tray he hoped for concrete results.

He had not long to wait.

The lady in grey had finished the tea which she had been having upon Mr. Wigan's entry. Now she rose to her feet and walked over to him.

"Do please excuse me," she said without a trace of foreign accent. "You are Mr. Wigan, are you not?"

Mr. Wigan rose politely to his feet.

"Yes, I am Mr. Wigan, Madam," he said, "but I am at a loss to——"

"Oh, you wonder how I know?" Mrs. Baumeister broke in with a laugh which was a very agreeable sound to hear. "Oh, I saw your name in the register and I asked the boy to point you out to me."

"But," Mr. Wigan began, "I don't understand. Should I know you, or——?"

"Oh, dear, no," was the reply. "You *are* Mr. Wigan who used to teach many years ago in Japan?"

"Yes, I taught in Japan," Mr. Wigan said, "but why are we standing? Won't you please sit down?"

"Oh, thank you. I do hope you are not annoyed with me."

Mr. Wigan made a gesture indicative of his pleasure.

"You see," Mrs. Baumeister went on, "I am a great friend of one of your old pupils who asked me to try and see you when I came to England. He seemed to think that everybody knows everybody in England—or perhaps he thought that you would be as conspicuous here as you were in Japan. And lo and behold! I find you in the first hotel I come to in London. What a strange coincidence!"

"Very strange, indeed," Mr. Wigan replied without a trace of sarcasm in his tone. "What was the name of this pupil who had such an opinion of my eminence?"

"Oh, you would probably not remember him," the woman said. "His name is Isogai Taketsura."

"No, I'm afraid I don't remember the name," the ex-schoolmaster said regretfully. "I had so many pupils and it is so many years ago."

'And,' he added to himself, 'you should have chosen a commoner name, my lady, instead of one 'from Lafcadio Hearn.'

"Naturally," the woman said. "He is, however, a very clever engineer nowadays, and——"

"May I ask," Mr. Wigan interrupted, "your own name?"

"Oh, of course. How silly of me!" she gushed. "I thought I had told you. My name is Baumeister—Mrs. Baumeister."



"Oh, you are a German?" Mr. Wigan said. "I must congratulate you on your English."

A silvery laugh was the answer to this.

"I am German," she replied, "only by marriage. I am English by birth. I married my husband in Japan. Unfortunately he died last year and I have come back to England to live. But it is so lonely here. All my friends are scattered and I know nobody now."

"That," Mr. Wigan said with deliberate sententiousness, "is one of the penalties of a long absence from one's own country."

"Yes," Mrs. Baumeister agreed, "that is, indeed, true. To make matters worse, too, I am technically German, you see, and I cannot even do any A.R.P. work which would distract me and occupy my time—and time does hang so heavy on my hands."

"Oh, but you will soon form a new circle of acquaintances," Mr. Wigan encouraged her. "You are a young woman, and an attractive one if I may say so, and your only difficulty will be in picking and choosing among the many who will be anxious to give you entertainment."

"Ah," was the reply, "but I do not wish to lead a life of gaiety. As you say, I am still young, but I have no desire to be with young people. My husband was so much older than I and I found him and the men of his age so much more interesting."

'H'm!' Mr. Wigan said to himself, 'so that's your line, is it? Very well, I shall play up to you, Madam.'

"That," he said aloud, "is very agreeable hearing to one of the older generation. May I hope that you will honour me with your company from time to time while you are in London?"

"Oh, how nice of you!" Mrs. Baumeister exclaimed.

"But, Mr. Wigan, you are probably a very busy man and I——"

"I? A busy man!" Mr. Wigan laughed. "Indeed, no. I am, unfortunately, anything but that. I have retired from active work, and I have some difficulty in finding occupation for a large number of my waking hours."

"It is a shame," Mrs. Baumeister declared, "that men should have to retire at the height of their powers. Surely the British Government could have found a means of utilizing you. Your knowledge of the Japanese language, for example——"

Mr. Wigan smiled.

"My dear lady," he replied, "this country does not show its appreciation of linguists in a practical manner. The knowledge of languages is no passport ~~then~~ to a commercial career, let alone a post under the Government, and if one is over a certain age one must just make a job for oneself."

"Have you made a job for yourself?" Mrs. Baumeister asked. "I am sure you have. You are so active—both physically and mentally!"

"You flatter me," Mr. Wigan said, "but as a matter of fact I do sometimes find means of employing my poor talents as a Japanese scholar."

"Really? How interesting!"

"Oh, it is only in a small way," the ex-schoolmaster declared. "The other day, for example, I was asked to translate something written in Japanese which was found on a dead body."

Mr. Wigan was covertly watching the woman's face as he spoke.

"Really?" she said merely. "And was it important—I mean the Japanese writing?"



It was obvious to Mr. Wigan that she was not interested. This surprised him, for if his suspicions were correct Mrs. Baumeister was the associate of those responsible for the deaths of Barholm, Stavebrook and Markson.

"No," he replied carelessly. "Apparently not."

It was evident then to him that the conversation had not taken the turn which the lady had intended to give to it, for she came back to her previous point. Mr. Wigan had to admit that it was not unskillfully done.

"Being retired from active work," she said, "must be boring to an energetic man. He is almost in the same position as a person like myself who returns home after a long absence—he is out of touch with his surroundings."

"Yes," Mr. Wigan agreed, "there is some analogy."

During the conversation he kept his eye on the door of the lounge. He was beginning to wonder how long he would have to keep Mrs. Baumeister engaged in talk when Detective Dalrymple returned. The young man gave an almost imperceptible nod before sitting down in the chair he had previously occupied.

Meanwhile Mrs. Baumeister was speaking, and Mr. Wigan realized that she had reached the point from which he had unconsciously headed her off.

"Since we have met so opportunely," she was saying, "I wonder if I might be so—how do you say?—daring as to ask you to dine with me this evening. After all, we have really been introduced by Isogai Taketsura, and I——"

"Oh," Mr. Wigan broke in with a laugh, "I think our introduction is quite in order, and that being so we must dine together. I, however, am the host—not you. You are dining with me to-night."

"How nice of you!" Mrs. Baumeister said. "But really, I did not wish to——"

"Not another word, Mrs. Baumeister," Mr. Wigan again interrupted. "Now, where would you like to dine? Not here, of course. We must make it a celebration, and——"

"Oh, no," was the hurried interjection, "not a celebration—just a quiet dinner in some small restaurant. You see, my heavy baggage has not yet arrived and I have no clothes for a large place. A man on the ship mentioned a very good restaurant—the, oh, have I forgotten the name? No, I wrote it down on a card."

She fumbled in her handbag and found a visiting card.

"Yes," she read, "'The Nip and Tuck.'"

"I'm afraid I don't know it," Mr. Wigan said.

"It is in Beak Street," Mrs. Baumeister told him, "wherever that is."

"Oh, I know Beak Street."

Mr. Wigan looked at his watch.

"Shall we dine at—er—half-past seven?" he asked. "That will give me time to write a letter and you, though you certainly do not need to do so, can powder your nose."

Mrs. Baumeister's silvery laugh was her reply as she rose.

"Then, that is arranged," Mr. Wigan declared. "I shall have a taxi at the door at twenty past seven."

"I shall be punctual," Mrs. Baumeister promised. "My husband taught me that virtue."

She left the lounge then, and the ex-schoolmaster had to admire her poise and carriage as she walked across the floor. He went over and sat down at a writing table near a window.



"Is everything arranged?" he said to the back of Detective Dalrymple's head, while he pretended to pick out notepaper from the table-rack.

Dalrymple did not change his position.

"Yes," he replied. "Mr. Channing was able to get the young chap out. He's not very fit, but he's very anxious to help. They're in the manager's office now."

"Good!" Mr. Wigan said. "Now listen carefully. I am dining with the lady—Mrs. Baumeister, she calls herself—at a place called 'The Nip and Tuck' in B——"

Dalrymple jumped, and then sat back again.

"Not 'The Nip and Tuck,' sir," he interrupted. "You mean 'The Nippon Duck' in Beak Street."

"Yes, that must be it," Mr. Wigan replied, "but I——"

"That's the place we've had under observation," Dalrymple interrupted. "It's more of a night club than a restaurant, and its reputation's none too good. It's kept by a Jap. I shouldn't go there, sir."

"I'm going there," Mr. Wigan stated, "and so are you. I don't know how you are going to arrange it, but I want support."

"That's all right, sir," the detective replied. "One or two of our chaps are bound to be members."

"Good! Now listen. I'm almost certain that an attempt will be made to put me out of commission. Prevent that if you can, but if you can't the main thing is not to lose sight of this woman. She will eventually lead you to the people we want. Have a talk with Mr. Channing and tell him what I have said. I shall wait here, but don't talk to me unless there is nobody else in the room."

The detective got up a moment later and strolled out.

He was away for nearly a quarter of an hour, during which time several people drifted in and out of the lounge. When he came back he did not immediately approach Mr. Wigan, but sat down at another writing table and began to write. After a little he got up and came over to the ex-schoolmaster's desk.

"Excuse me," he said. "May I take an envelope from here? There aren't any at my table."

"Certainly," Mr. Wigan replied and covered with a piece of blotting paper the note which Dalrymple had dropped. A moment later he read it.

*It is the same woman, he read. Mr. C. says all arrangements will be made at the N.D. You are not to interfere even if there is a row.*



## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

AT TWENTY PAST SEVEN Mr. Wigan had the promised taxi at the door of the hotel. Mrs. Baumeister came out to the entrance punctually to the second. The ex-schoolmaster had smartened himself up to some extent in that he had donned a less shabby suit, and he gazed with admiration on the lady who professed to have no clothes. She was not in evening dress, but had changed to an extremely smart afternoon frock, which was covered by an equally well-cut garment which Mr. Wigan in his ignorance of things feminine called in his own mind a "coat-cloak-wrap-thing." His apparent pleasure in the attractive appearance of his guest was not dimmed by the fact, which he had observed, that at each end of the short street a car had been drawn up near the kerb as if waiting for somebody inside the houses opposite. He noted as his taxi moved off that a man and a woman in evening clothes were entering the car ahead and mentally applauded Channing's methods of averting suspicion. His fair neighbour would certainly never dream that two young people, obviously going out for an evening's amusement, formed part of an escort for him.

He had instructed the taxi-driver to take them to the 'Nip and Tuck' in Beak Street. That worthy, whose licence might have been open to question, looked at him for a moment and then smiled.

"I get you, sir," he said. "You mean the 'Nippon Duck,' I expect."

Mr. Wigan looked at his guest questioningly.

"You *did* say the 'Nip and Tuck'?" he asked.

"Oh!" Mrs. Baumeister exclaimed. "Perhaps I mistook what my friend said. Yes, it is probably the 'Nippon Duck.'"

Mr. Wigan noted that her pronunciation of the last word still retained something of the harder dental sound.

'English, are you?' he said to himself.

The entrance to the 'Nippon Duck' was a shabby hall squeezed in between two shops. Over the narrow doorway was a hanging sign, on which was depicted an animal such as Mr. Wigan had never seen in Japan or elsewhere. It bore some resemblance, as far as its Sloperesque head was concerned, to a Red-crested Pochard, while its body was undoubtedly that of a cormorant.

"I have never seen a duck like that in Japan," Mr. Wigan laughed after going through the farce of paying the taxi-driver.

"No, indeed," Mrs. Baumeister agreed, but she did not even look up at the sign.

For a person who was presumably a stranger to the resort she showed an unerring instinct for the right direction, walking ahead of her escort and not hesitating a moment at either of the doors on the ground floor. Mr. Wigan, seeing this, nodded contentedly.

They were greeted on the next floor by an undersized Japanese of engaging mien, dressed in an ornate kimono, who shook hands with himself, bowed low and drew in his breath with true Nippon politeness.

"I wercome you," he said to Mrs. Baumeister. "I am glad to see the——"

He stopped suddenly and Mr. Wigan *knew* that his guest had given a warning.



"Oh," the little man went on. "Excuse. The croak-room for lady is here."

He waved towards a door.

"And you, sir, I wercome," he then said to Mr. Wigan as Mrs. Baumeister disappeared to the room indicated.

"Thank you," Mr. Wigan said seriously. "And where is the cloakroom for gentlemen?"

"Forrow me," the Japanese said, and went ahead.

Mr. Wigan had a sudden idea and felt for his wallet.

It was evident that the man in the kimono was cloak-room attendant as well as doorman. Mr. Wigan thought he was more.

"You are the proprietor?" he asked, taking off his coat, and surrendering it.

"I am unworthy owner of 'Nippon Duck,' " was the reply.

Mr. Wigan drew a slip of paper from his wallet. It was the warning he had found in his pocket on the Westminster Underground station. The Japanese looked at it and read, half aloud:

*"Shinin ni kuchi nashi."*

Then he stared in obvious terror at Mr. Wigan.

"I understand," he said with a tremble in his voice.

"I understand."

"I sincerely hope so," Mr. Wigan replied in Japanese, and added to himself in English: 'I'm blest if I do.'

The club proprietor opened his eyes wider.

"Everything will be as you order," he said in the same language. "Only say what you desire."

Mr. Wigan would have liked to have further converse with the little Japanese, but he did not dare risk exciting the suspicions of his guest by any undue delay. He contented himself, therefore, with making a gesture

which enjoined silence and went out to the lobby. Mrs. Baumeister was coming out of the ladies' cloakroom and they were at once conducted by the proprietor to a table at the far end of the room, which evidently was the restaurant. A vacant polished space in the middle was obviously a dance floor. Mrs. Baumeister expressed a preference for another table in the corner near a door, which led to some other part of the premises. The Japanese looked at Mr. Wigan and seemed relieved when the latter nodded his consent to the transfer.

Mr. Wigan allowed his guest to choose the seat whose back was to the wall, but ignored her suggestion that he should occupy the place on her right—a position which, though it gave him a view down the room, left him unprotected from an attack by anyone opening the door at his rear.

"Oh, no," he said. "I thought it was understood that you are my guest. I am old-fashioned and I like my guest to be on my right."

From where he sat he could, then, observe the opening of the door, and also with little effort see the rest of the room.

There were only three other tables occupied—two by youthful couples and the third by three men. To get to their table Mrs. Baumeister and he had had to pass that at which these three people sat, and Mr. Wigan noted that they had ceased to talk during their passage down the room. He decided to keep an eye on that table.

A waiter—also a Japanese in kimono—came with the menu card, and in a few moments they had chosen a meal which was a good compromise between East and West.

Now that they were at the 'Nippon Duck' Mrs.



Baumeister seemed to have lost her previous vivacity. She seemed distraught and preoccupied, and was obviously paying little attention to Mr. Wigan's remarks. From time to time she cast furtive looks towards the entrance. Mr. Wigan pretended not to notice this and continued to make the usual observations on this and that. Among these he interpolated some comments on things Japanese as compared with matters European—comments which were of a nature calculated to arouse disagreement and even flat contradiction on the part of anyone with even a superficial acquaintance with Japan, but even these did not evoke his companion's interest. Either, Mr. Wigan concluded, she was thinking of other matters more urgent or she had never set foot in the Orient in her life.

Suddenly, however, Mrs. Baumeister awoke to life and resumed her previous animated manner. Instinctively Mr. Wigan sought for a reason to explain this sudden metamorphosis. The dining room was gradually filling up and most of the tables were now occupied, if one were to judge by the languages spoken, by cosmopolitan groups. Several were in evening clothes, but the majority of the men present were in ordinary lounge suits. A small band took its place at the other end of the room and began to play softly, while the diners began to talk more loudly. Mr. Wigan's eyes searched the room discreetly while he talked to Mrs. Baumeister. He was wondering whether Channing had managed to introduce any of his men to the club, when suddenly he caught sight of four men who sat at a table in the row nearest the dance floor, busily engaged in eating as if they were pressed for time. Something about the back of one of them was familiar to Mr. Wigan and then his mind went back to his ride in the car to Bounds Green.



It was the same view that he had had of the young man who had produced the M.I.5 identity card.

A mad idea came to Mr. Wigan's mind. He gave all his attention to the entertainment of his guest for the next ten minutes. Then, when they were awaiting the arrival of coffee and there was a moment's silence, he said to her:

"Do you mind very much if I leave you for one moment? There is a friend of mine over there with whom I should like to have a word."

Mrs. Baumeister seemed for a moment unwilling to allow him to leave the table, but after the first hesitation she relented.

"Oh, certainly," she said, "but you mustn't be long. I am enjoying myself and soon they will begin to play dance music. You must dance with me."

As he threaded his way between the tables he asked himself a question:

'And how does she know they will soon be playing dance music?'

He had to squeeze past a table at which two young men were laughing and talking with their partners—two very presentable young women. One of these dropped her vanity case on the floor at that moment and Mr. Wigan gallantly stooped to pick it up. While he was still bending he heard one of the men say in a voice lower than the hum of conversation:

"Don't leave the room yet, Mr. Wigan. You'll spoil things if you do."

Mr. Wigan gave no sign that he had heard, but bowed as he handed the vanity case to its owner.

"Just listen," he murmured and passed on.

When he was level with the table which was his destination, he stopped beside the young man whom he had



met that morning. One of his neighbours looked up at him in alarm.

"Mr. Martin?" Mr. Wigan said in a voice which was louder than his usual well-modulated tone, "I saw you a moment ago, and could not leave without thanking you for the lift you gave me to Bounds Green this morning."

'Mr. Martin' stared at him. The three men were also staring. It was evident that this move had been entirely unexpected. The man opposite 'Mr. Martin,' a clean-shaven man who wore a monocle, was the first to recover from his surprise.

"What is this?" he asked haughtily. "You call my friend Mr. Martin. You make a mistake, my friend."

"I do not think so," Mr. Wigan declared firmly. "I have a good memory for—er—the back of people's necks. His moustache, I see, has gone, but——"

"If you do not go away," the man with the monocle threatened, "I shall be obliged to call the proprietor."

Mr. Wigan bowed politely.

"I should like to hear Mr. Martin deny that we have ever met," he said.

As he spoke he noticed that one of the men at the other table was walking in the direction of the exit, leaving the two girls and the other man at the table, and that the little kimono-clad proprietor was looking across from the middle of the dance floor.

"We have never met before, sir," 'Mr. Martin' declared.

"In that case," Mr. Wigan replied, "I must apologize. I have never seen such an extraordinary resemblance."

"So," the man with the monocle said and ostentatiously sipped from his empty coffee cup to show that the incident was closed.

Mr. Wigan bowed and turned away. As he did so one of the girls at the near-by table jumped up hurriedly from her seat and almost ran to the door near the table where he had left Mrs. Baumeister. That door was now closing and Mrs. Baumeister was no longer there.

Just then all the lights went out.



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

**O**H, DAMN!" MR. WIGAN heard in the darkness as he reached his table. "The door is locked."

There was a momentary silence in the room so that the remark was clearly heard by everybody there, and a clamour arose.

"That is certainly very unfortunate," Mr. Wigan said under cover of the noise. "Who are you?"

"Is that Mr. Wigan?" came in reply.

"Yes."

"Well, your girl friend got away, I'm afraid," the girl said. "Why on earth did you leave her?"

Before Mr. Wigan could reply there was a shot, followed by silence, and then by a recrudescence of the noise in the room. Women began to scream. Then, just as suddenly as they had gone out, the lights came on again.

"Keep your seats, everybody!"

It was Channing's voice.

Mr. Wigan looked around him. The Superintendent, accompanied by three other men, was standing at the entrance to the restaurant. The girl who had spoken in the darkness was seated in Mrs. Baumeister's place, calmly lighting a cigarette. She smiled at Mr. Wigan.

"Sit down," she said. "I wonder what that shot was?"

They did not remain long in ignorance. A scream came from some woman who was pointing at the table from which Mr. Wigan had just come. There were no longer four men there. Only one was there, and he was sprawled face downwards over the table-top, from which

a trickle of blood flowed slowly to the floor. It was 'Mr. Martin.'

"Good Heavens!" Mr. Wigan exclaimed.

"Dead Men Have No Mouths," was the surprising remark from his new companion.

Meanwhile one of the men who had been with Channing had gone over to the table and was examining the figure there.

"Dead, sir," he announced.

"Keep your seats, everybody!" Channing repeated. "This is the police."

Mr. Wigan half rose.

"I must go and tell him about the other men."

"Don't," the girl beside him said. "Young Bill Marfleet has already told him."

"I wonder where Mrs. Baumeister went," Mr. Wigan said then.

"Oh, she's probably a mile away," the girl replied. "This door is evidently another way out."

Just then that door was opened and a dishevelled Mrs. Baumeister, followed by a policeman in uniform who held her arm, came in. She did not look in Mr. Wigan's direction. She was led up to Channing.

"She turned off the main switch," the policeman reported. "I caught her at it. She's bitten my arm, too."

"Ah, Mrs. Baumeister, I believe," Channing said. "Good! Take her down to the van and have your arm seen to. I don't think you'll get rabies, but——"

He did not finish the sentence, for he was too busy defending himself from the furious attack of a screaming, cursing woman. The Superintendent knew his German well, but he always maintained later that during that short but violent interlude he had added considerably to his vocabulary of abuse.



It did not take long to overpower Mrs. Baumeister and she was led away. Channing called the Japanese proprietor to him. The little man came over, his hands in his sleeves, smiling nervously.

"What's the meaning of all this schemozzle?" the Superintendent shouted at him.

The Japanese gaped and swallowed but seemed unable to utter a word. Mr. Wigan rose to his feet. The girl put her hand on his arm as if to pull him down again. He removed the hand gently.

"No," he said firmly. "I am taking a hand now. I think I can make that little man talk."

He left his seat and went up to where Channing stood face to face with the Japanese. The Superintendent looked at him as if he had never seen him in his life.

"I ordered everybody to keep their seats," he said. "What do you want?"

"I want a word with you in private," Mr. Wigan answered mildly.

Channing turned round to one of his subordinates.

"Put this man in the van with the others. Take this fellow in the dressing-gown as well," he ordered, and then to the people at the tables: "If anybody else wants a ride in the Black Maria he can leave his seat before I tell him."

Mr. Wigan was hurt at this treatment, but he said nothing. He left the club premises in the wake of the Japanese, preceded and followed by a police escort. They had already reached the street door when a policeman in uniform came clattering down the stairs and overtook the plain-clothes man, who brought up the rear. Mr. Wigan stopped in reply to a "p-s-sist!"

"Mr. Channing says," the constable whispered, "to take this gentleman and the Jap to Cannon Row in one

of the cars. He hopes the gentleman won't mind being put in a cell with the Jap and he says he knows Mr. Wigan'll make him talk. You're to pretend to treat them both as prisoners. See?"

"I see," the plain-clothes man said.

The Japanese and his escort had stopped to wait for them just inside the front door, round which a crowd had gathered. Then all four men reached the pavement in a single group. The sight of the kimono raised a laugh, but its wearer paid no heed. Suddenly, however, he shrank back between a plain-clothes man and Mr. Wigan.

"Rook! Rook!" he shouted, pointing into the crowd. "He kill! He kill!"

There was a sharp crack and the Japanese fell back against the detective. The latter held him up.

"That was a shot," he said to his colleague. "Who fired it?"

The other plain-clothes man and Detective Dalrymple, who suddenly appeared from the door of the club, dived through the crowd. The Japanese, after his first stumble, had stood erect again, smiling. Mr. Wigan saw a dark stain getting larger on the front of the kimono.

"He's hit," he said to the detective. "Look!"

"It is nothing," the Japanese said, still wearing his fixed smile. "Only the shoulder."

"Better get him to hospital," Mr. Wigan suggested.

"Yes," the man agreed. "You take his other arm. Come on."

They led the Japanese to a car a few yards down the street.

On the way to the hospital the detective, engaged in administering first aid, murmured to Mr. Wigan:

"That puts the kibosh on the Super's scheme."



"Perhaps not," Mr. Wigan said. "I'll have a talk with him."

To the detective's amazement there followed a rapid exchange in a language unknown to him between the two prisoners. At times the Japanese became so excited that the detective had to restrain him from moving about lest the flow of blood became more copious. The ex-schoolmaster's part in the conversation was confined to an occasional short exclamation or question. Though obviously weakening, the Japanese continued to talk even when they reached the Charing Cross hospital, and was still talking—Mr. Wigan hanging anxiously on every word—when he was placed prone on an operating table.

"He's a blooming marvell!" the detective said when they were outside.

"Yes," Mr. Wigan agreed absently, "but now I must get to Mr. Channing."

"I don't understand," the plain-clothes man said, "what this is all about, sir. Are you my prisoner or not?"

Mr. Wigan smiled.

"That," he replied, "is as you please, but I think it would be wiser of you to remain at the hospital with the Japanese. I think he should be kept under observation."

"Yes, perhaps you're right," the officer conceded. "I wonder if they got the fellow who fired at him."

"I shall go to Scotland Yard," Mr. Wigan announced, "and wait there for Mr. Channing. I suppose the car has gone."

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "It was the area superintendent's car."

"Then I will take a taxi. I will tell Mr. Channing you are here."

"Very good, sir," the detective replied, "and I'll phone my inspector."

Mr. Wigan reached Scotland House in a few minutes, for Whitehall was now empty of all but the ordinary evening traffic. He was admitted to Channing's room to await the Superintendent's arrival. He had to wait half an hour.

Channing was not in a good humour when he did arrive, and he sat down at his desk before uttering a word.

"So you're here," he said then. "What happened?"

Mr. Wigan told him.

"I don't know whether they caught the man who fired or not!" he concluded.

"They didn't," Channing said shortly.

"Oh!"

"The whole thing was badly managed," the Superintendent went on, "and you're responsible to some extent, Mr. Wigan. Why on earth did you go over to the table where those people were sitting?"

Mr. Wigan smiled ruefully.

"It seems I can do nothing right," he said. "I thought it rather a brilliant idea. You see, one of the men—the one who was killed—was the fellow who posed as an M.I.5 man."

Channing nodded.

"I know," he said. "We found the card in his pocket."

"Well, then," Mr. Wigan resumed, "as I gathered that you would have some of your people in the room I took that method of putting my finger on him, so to speak, for their benefit."

Channing smiled for the first time.

"Well," he said, "I suppose it can't be helped. We did get some of the people we are after, but the trouble is, Mr. Wigan, that we have no evidence of any illegal activities against any of them, except Mrs. Baumeister."



"Then she is the woman I thought her to be?"

"Yes. That was a bit of quick thinking on your part. Mrs. Baumeister is the woman who tried to get young Lipovitch—Barholm's nephew—to help by getting some of his customers into debt. Even in her case, however, there are difficulties. It is not an indictable offence to persuade a person to get into debt, and we can't therefore, by any stretch of imagination, claim that incitement to persuade is an offence."

"That is true," Mr. Wigan said, "but what about the attempt to murder Lipovitch?"

"Yes, what about it?" Channing retorted. "We have no possible means of proving that Mrs. Baumeister had anything whatever to do with it."

"You can always charge her," Mr. Wigan suggested, "with obstructing the police in the discharge of their duty. She was caught in the act of putting out the lights."

"Yes," the Superintendent replied, "she was, but she can easily prove, if she wishes, that she did not know the police were raiding the 'Nippon Duck.' We hadn't actually reached the restaurant when she left by the end door."

"Quite true," Mr. Wigan admitted. "Then, what are you going to do with her?"

"I don't know yet," Channing replied. "I'll have to have a talk with the Assistant Commissioner about that. If only I could bluff her into talking!"

"I don't think you will easily bluff that lady," Mr. Wigan said. "Did you get the men who were at the table with the man who called himself Martin?"

"Only one of them," the Superintendent declared. "The others got away. But we're wasting time. Did

you get any useful information from the Jap? You say he talked."

"Whether the information is useful or not I don't know," Mr. Wigan declared, "but he certainly talked."

"What did he say?" Channing asked.



## CHAPTER TWENTY

"**H**IS NAME," MR. WIGAN began, "is, as you probably know, Nakimura. He came here from Berlin, where he also used to run a club of the same type as the 'Nippon Duck.' I gathered that there he got into some trouble with the authorities, but he was very reticent upon that point. I concluded, however, that it was serious trouble since, rather than pay the penalty for it, he accepted the suggestion of a certain Colonel von Sturmheim that he should come over to London and open the 'Nippon Duck.' This colonel even provided him with the necessary capital to do so. There was, however, a condition attached to this. A room in the club was to be at the exclusive disposal of such people as could show him—what do you think?—No, you couldn't possibly guess."

"I might," Channing replied with a smile. "It was one of those fake M.I.5 cards."

"Quite correct," Mr. Wigan said, "though I can't imagine how you found out."

"It was a good guess, wasn't it?" the Superintendent laughed. "As a matter of fact, not only your 'Mr. Martin,' but Mrs. Baumeister and the fellow we arrested had those cards."

"Are they really like the M.I.5 identity cards?" Mr. Wigan asked.

"They *are* M.I.5 cards," was Channing's grim reply, "even to the signatures. Colonel Thornton-Hooke says they are undoubtedly in his fist, though he swears he never signed them. However, go on with your story."

"Nakimura," Mr. Wigan went on, "says that the room—the one behind the restaurant into which Mrs. Baumeister disappeared—was fitted up as a combined lounge and office, but it had one curious——"

"I know—I know," Channing broke in, "it had a listening apparatus which could be plugged in to any table at will. We found the microphones. Go on."

"The Japanese," Mr. Wigan resumed, "claims that he did not know the object of all the paraphernalia, but that, of course, may be believed or not. He undoubtedly knew that something illegal was afoot. The people who used the room were all Germans, but now and again other men and women were invited as guests. Among these guests was, for instance, on one occasion an English detective, who was known to Nakimura as Mr. Pilcher."

"What's that?" Channing asked eagerly. "No, go on."

"On another occasion," Mr. Wigan went on, "the guest was Lady Cranhurst."

Mr. Wigan stopped as if expecting some comment or question, but the Superintendent merely nodded. The ex-schoolmaster resumed.

"To come to this evening's doings," he said, "Nakimura received orders to prepare the room for one of their guest-nights. This preparation consisted in obliterating all signs of the office and stowing away the listening apparatus, of setting up a couple of card tables, and generally fitting the place out as a sort of inner circle for the privileged members of the club."

"I think I know what's coming," Channing said, "but go on."

"One of the conditions of Nakimura's tenure of office as club proprietor," Mr. Wigan continued, "was that he, and he alone, should be in attendance during special functions in this inner room, and that he should be silent



regarding everything which took place there. On previous occasions the guest went directly to this room accompanied by the member who invited him, but to-night the procedure was changed. The guest was to dine in the restaurant. At a certain moment one of the members was to give a signal which Nakimura was to pass on to a man somewhere in the back regions of the club, who in his turn was to turn the lights out at the main switch. There was then to be some delay in bringing the lights on again, and Nakimura was to go to the table at which the guest was seated and tell the diners that the matter would be adjusted soon, making the suggestion that they should have their coffee in the inner room where, for some unknown reason, the lights had not gone out. The little man claims that the 'Lights Out' signal was given to-night, but that he disregarded it."

"Why?" Channing asked as Mr. Wigan paused.

"Because," Mr. Wigan replied with a mock-dramatic gesture, "I was the guest in question."

"I guessed that," the Superintendent said, "and that's no pun. But why the devil should that make a difference to your Nakimura?"

"It did," Mr. Wigan told him, "because without intending to do so I frightened the life out of him."

"How?"

"By showing him the '*Shinin ni kuchi nashi*' I——"

"The what? Oh, that warning thing! Why should that frighten him?" Channing asked.

"All I know about that," Mr. Wigan said, "is deduced from one phrase which he used when telling me all this: 'When I saw the proverb I knew I must not do as they said.' Time was too short to ask what he meant. Besides, I was too anxious to know more."



"Did you learn any more?"

"Only one thing," Mr. Wigan replied. "Nakimura says that 'Mr. Martin'—whose real name, by the way, was Virschau—was shot by the man with the monocle, who also fired at Nakimura himself."

"What's the name of the man with the monocle?"

"All that the Japanese himself knew was that he was called 'Herr Maior' and that he came to the club only very rarely."

"Why was the other fellow shot by him?"

"Because, according to Makimura, he was of no further use to the Herr Maior."

"Nice fellow, the Herr Maior," Channing commented.

"Very!"

"You're a very lucky man, Mr. Wigan," the Superintendent said.

"I certainly have been fortunate so far," Mr. Wigan agreed. "I'm afraid I was destined for higher things to-night than sitting here with you."

"Yes, you might have been keeping company with Lady Cranhurst and Captain Pilcher."

"Captain Pilcher?"

"Yes, the so-called detective your Japanese friend mentioned," Channing amplified. "In reality he was an M.I.5 man. His body was found in Teddington Lock six months ago."

"Didn't Lady Cranhurst come to a sudden end, too?" Mr. Wigan asked. "I remember faintly having seen her name in some connection lately."

"You probably read the account of the inquest on her dead body," Channing replied. "The verdict was 'Death By Misadventure.' There was no evidence to show how she came to be at the bottom of the hotel lift shaft. We left it at that. We knew she was at her wits'



end for money, and we knew she was not above earning it in strange ways, but I must say I didn't know she had any connection with that gang."

"M'm!" Mr. Wigan said, "I certainly *am* lucky."

"Now, are you convinced that you have done enough in this business?" Channing asked.

"Goodness gracious, no!" Mr. Wigan replied emphatically. "I have done literally nothing yet."

"The gang evidently don't think so," the Superintendent replied. "What else do you think you would like to do?"

"I should like to have half an hour's conversation with Mrs. Baumeister," was the reply, "in a room fitted with a microphone."

Channing laughed.

"What?" he asked. "You don't imagine, do you, that you have made a conquest there. That's not a woman! She's a wildcat! Look at that scratch on my wrist. She'll tear you to bits."

He pulled up his sleeve to show the wound, now discoloured by iodine.

"No, I don't think she will tear me to bits," Mr. Wigan replied calmly, "and I have no illusions about my fatal attractions, but I do think that I can make her talk. By the way, doesn't she speak English well?"

"I don't know," Channing growled. "I only heard her German, and it's just marvellous."

Mr. Wigan laughed.

"Well?" he asked. "What do you say to my idea?"

"It's a matter I can't decide off my own bat," Channing replied. "I'll have to ask the Assistant Commissioner about it. Meanwhile, I'd like to know where the devil we stand in this affair. It's a terrible mix-up."

Mr. Wigan ignored this, for he knew that it presaged

one of the Superintendent's soliloquies, for which he required an audience, but which served to clarify his ideas on any case upon which he happened to be engaged.

"What about the man you arrested to-night?" the ex-schoolmaster asked. "Have you any information about him? Did you get any information from him?"

"No, he won't talk. All I know is that he gets letters addressed to Hans Appelbusch at the boarding-house kept by your doddering old captain fellow and his Polish wife."

"Then," Mr. Wigan declared, "the obvious thing to do is to interview the Polish lady and to search the man's room."

"That is being attended to," Channing replied, "but I don't hope for much from it. You can't expect a boarding-house keeper to know everything about her boarders, especially when they are foreigners from half a dozen different countries."

"True," Mr. Wigan agreed.

"It's time you went to your hotel to bed, Mr. Wigan," the Superintendent declared. "So I'm going to shoo you off."

"What are you going to do?"

"Me? I'm going to try and get some order into my ideas," Channing replied. "This business is so complicated that I'm all muddled. I have an appointment with an M.I.5 fellow in half an hour from now. Perhaps between us we'll manage to work it all out."

"Isn't there anything I can do," Mr. Wigan asked, "to-morrow, I mean—not to-night."

"I'm going to ask the A.C. about that interview," the Superintendent said, "because I think there may be



something in your idea of having a chat with the Baumeister woman."

"Yes, but you can't keep her indefinitely," Mr. Wigan objected, "especially as you have no charge to bring against her."

"Oh, I've got enough to keep her a few days," Channing declared. "What about this scratch on my wrist? That's enough to make it assault, obstruction of the police, abusive language and what not."

"When shall I know whether the Assistant Commissioner consents or not?" Mr. Wigan insisted.

"To-morrow sometime."

"In the meantime, I suppose," Mr. Wigan replied, "I shall have to twiddle my thumbs."

"Gosh!" Channing exclaimed suddenly. "I'm going potty! Of course, there's something you can do. You can save us hours of valuable time."

Without explaining further he lifted the receiver of the house telephone and called for an officer by name.

"Have you still got that parcel of stuff we took away from the 'Nippon Duck'?" he asked. "You have? Well, bring it along to my room, will you? Thanks."

A moment later a man in plain clothes, whom Mr. Wigan remembered having seen at the club, came in with a parcel wrapped in brown paper.

"I brought the lot, sir," he said, "but every article is labelled telling where it was found."

While he was speaking he was undoing the string which held the paper together.

The contents consisted of papers of all kinds. Channing leaned over them and picked out from the mess a small book bound in Japanese fashion, in silk.

"Here," he said, handing it over to Mr. Wigan, "what do you make of that?"

Mr. Wigan undid the outer jacket and opened the book at the first page.

"This," he said, after a moment, "is the diary of a Lieutenant-Colonel Matsugoro, of the Japanese Army."

"Good! Can you read it?"

Mr. Wigan turned over a few pages.

"Yes," he said, "it is very clearly written. Who is Lieutenant-Colonel Matsugoro?"

"Unless I'm very much out in my guess," Channing replied, "he is known to you as Nakimura."



## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

**M**R. WIGAN SLEPT PEACEFULLY in his hotel bedroom. Before leaving Scotland House he had tried to persuade Channing to allow him to take the diary with him, but the Superintendent was firm in refusal.

"No," he said. "I am as anxious as you are to know what's in it, but there are two reasons why I can't let you have it. One is that you may be attacked on the way home and we'll lose the diary; the——"

"Where is Detective Dalrymple?" Mr. Wigan interrupted.

"Never you mind," Channing replied, "where he is. I'm not going to let this diary out of the building, and that's flat."

"What is the second reason?"

"Oh, the second reason is that you would probably read the blessed thing all night and get no sleep."

In the light of early morning Mr. Wigan was glad that Channing had been so obstinate. He had not realized how tired the events of the day had made him, and only the contrast after the night's rest brought it home to him.

"I really believe I was tired," he said to his reflection in the shaving mirror. "James Septimus Wigan, you are not so young as you used to be. In fact, you are getting too old for adventure."

If he had a police escort on his way to Scotland Yard he did not notice it. He arrived at Channing's office just as the Superintendent was entering.

"You're early, Mr. Wigan," was Channing's greeting.

"Yes," Mr. Wigan agreed. "I have a lot to do to-day. There is that diary to read and Mrs. Baumeister to interview, and Heaven knows what after that."

"One thing at a time," the Superintendent said with a smile. "We'll confine ourselves to the diary for the present. I'm going to let you have this room to yourself for the greater part of the day."

"I take it," Mr. Wigan said, "that you would like me to make a *précis* or summary of the diary?"

"I shouldn't like to ask anyone to take on the job of summarizing a diary," Channing replied. "No, I should like you simply to read it from cover to cover and, only if there is anything relevant to this business we're engaged on, to make a translation of the passages concerned."

"I see. Suppose, however, there is nothing which appears to be relevant to this business, but there is something which points to—well, not to put a fine point on it—to Japanese espionage, what then? After all a Japanese colonel does not become night-club proprietor just for fun—or even for the money it brings in."

"In that case," Channing replied, "mark the passages concerned and we will attend to that side of the matter later."

Mr. Wigan nodded.

"Very good," he said, "give me the diary."

"It will be here in a minute; I didn't keep it here all night."

A few minutes later the diary was in Mr. Wigan's hands.

"I warn you," he said to Channing, "that there may be parts I don't understand. My Japanese is a bit rusty after all these years."



"If there's anything in the way of dictionaries you need, just call out," Channing replied.

"You think you can provide them?"

"We'll make a shot at it."

While the Superintendent dealt with a mass of accumulated paper work Mr. Wigan sat in an armchair near the window. He was still reading when Channing went out and did not, in fact, take his eyes from the neatly-brushed pages until a messenger came in and asked him if he wished to go out to lunch. Mr. Wigan only wanted a couple of sandwiches to be brought up to him, but he did not notice their arrival a few minutes later, nor had they been eaten when Channing arrived back in the late afternoon to find him reading the final pages.

"This diary," he announced, "is most interesting."

"Since it has prevented you from eating those very stale-looking sandwiches," Channing replied, "it must be."

"Goodness gracious!" Mr. Wigan exclaimed. "I wondered what that curious feeling was. I am hungry."

He began at once to eat.

"Have you been very busy?" he asked Channing.

"Yes, fairly so," the Superintendent told him. "You will be interested to know that among the things we found at that club to-day were several sets of British Army uniforms."

"I know," Mr. Wigan said.

"How? We only found them an hour or two ago up in the loft."

"The diary," the ex-schoolmaster declared. "Did you find the hiding place in the little room—the inner circle?"

"No. Where?"

"Your men are not very thorough," Mr. Wigan declared. "There is a false wall there which reduces the length of the room by two feet six inches. It is against the end wall which separates the room from the well of the back stairs."

"Damn!" the Superintendent exclaimed, and took up the telephone receiver. "I must get our fellows on to that."

"Better not," Mr. Wigan stopped him. "This is a matter for your personal attention. It can, however, wait an hour."

"What for?"

"For my story."

Channing looked at his watch.

"I am seeing the A.C. in half an hour," he said. "Will it take as long as that?"

"No. I shall condense it and go into details with you later."

"All right!" the Superintendent said, and sat back in his chair. "I'm listening."

"To begin with," Mr. Wigan commenced, "let me say that your guess was correct. Lieutenant-Colonel Matsugoro and Nakimura are one."

"It wasn't a guess," Channing smiled. "I got that tit-bit from M.I.5. Smart lads at M.I.5!"

"Indeed, yes," Mr. Wigan agreed, and went on, "I shall call him 'the colonel' from now on. Reading between the lines of the diary, for he does not say so, the Japanese do not altogether see eye to eye in all things with their ally under the anti-Comintern pact. Colonel Matsugoro was actually sent to Berlin by the Intelligence department of his own army. He does not say exactly why, but it is obvious that they wanted more information about Germany and the Germans than could be



obtained by their official representatives in Berlin. With that adaptability which seems to be very characteristic of the Japanese the colonel conceived the brilliant idea of an exotic night club much more daring, however, than the 'Nippon Duck.' He collected a band of his fellow-countrymen to act as cooks, waiters and attendants and dressed them up in Japanese costumes. I'm afraid it was not a place to which you could, for example, take Mrs. Channing, but it seems to have attracted a number of young Army officers, S.S. and S.A. men, and from them the colonel obtained a mine of information on things military, political and economical, which he summarizes in his diary. It would take too long to tell you all that now, but I shall make translations which will, I have no doubt, be of great interest to the authorities here."

"Good!" Channing interjected.

"Then something seems to have happened," Mr. Wigan continued. "The colonel does not go into detail on this point, but there was some scandal at the 'Garden of Joy'—which was the name of the night club. This scandal seems to have involved some prominent Nazi officials, and matters were hushed up. The place was closed by police order, and Nakimura—as he already called himself—was arrested on some technical charge. While he was under arrest he was approached by an official of the Nazi Intelligence department, Colonel von Sturmheim, and an offer was made to him. The Germans seem to have had no idea that he was anything but Nakimura, a night-club proprietor, for they promised to release him if he would go to London and open a similar night club there. I have already told you how the Germans provided the capital and how they arranged for this club to be one of the meeting places of their principal agents."



Channing nodded.

"Somehow or other," Mr. Wigan went on, "the colonel managed to consult his superiors—probably through his Embassy—and they instructed him to consent. I am jumping ahead a little now when I tell you that he received further instructions to spy on these German spies, not only to study their methods but also to obtain possession of the information they collected. A sort of indirect or second-hand spy, in fact. He is rather humorous about it in his diary and actually quotes the Japanese equivalent of the proverb about the big fleas who have little fleas upon their backs to bite 'em, and so on *ad infinitum*. As time goes on he shows himself to be very contemptuous both of their methods and of the information they obtained by them. He has some things to say about Germans as psychologists which would, no doubt, surprise our Nazi friends.

"Certain suspicions seem to have been aroused in his mind—how, he does not make very clear—and he decided to make his surveillance of the Germans as thorough as possible. He did this by making a partition in the room where they met, thus shortening the room in the manner I have already told you. In the space between the partition and the original wall he installed the most up-to-date dictograph apparatus he could buy, with the result that, according to the diary, he has complete records of every conversation held in that room."

"Good Lord!" Channing exclaimed. "That ought to give us a leg-up."

"Judging by the references to some of the conversations," Mr. Wigan declared, "I should imagine that you have all the evidence you require. There is, for instance, a mention of Stavrich—that is to say, Stavebrook—which



seems to make it perfectly clear that the people in that back room were responsible for his death."

"We must get hold of those records at once," Channing declared, "but, as I say, I've got to go and see the A.C."

"My advice," Mr. Wigan said diffidently, "for what it is worth, is that you ask your Assistant Commissioner to postpone the talk for another two hours. I think you can safely promise him a great deal more important evidence than you have had yet."

The Superintendent considered this for a moment.

"M'yes," he said then, "but would two hours be enough? I shall have to get all the apparatus here and set it up again so that the records can be played over before I see the A.C."

"The diary," Mr. Wigan replied, "does not describe the apparatus. It merely calls it 'up-to-date.' I should think, therefore, that it can be transported all in one piece, and that the records can be easily packed."

"Yes, probably," Channing agreed. "I'll get Inspector Joliffe on that. He's a wizard with machinery."

"While you, I suppose," Mr. Wigan laughed, "think that all machinery is some sort of time-bomb, only to be approached by such wizards?"

"You're right, Mr. Wigan. I'm just scared of anything that has machinery in it. If I only look at the wife's vacuum cleaner it goes wrong. However, here goes for the A.C."

After a certain amount of persuasion by telephone the Assistant Commissioner consented to postpone the interview for two hours.

"Come on," Channing said, when he had replaced the receiver, "let's go before he changes his mind."

Fifteen minutes later they, followed by an inconspicu-

ous van, were stopping before the narrow doorway of the 'Nippon Duck.' The policeman on guard at the entrance reported that everything was in order, and that several Japanese waiters had tried hard, but in vain, to be allowed to enter the premises, ostensibly to remove personal effects left there on the preceding day.

It did not take long for Inspector Joliffe's men to discover the partition. They admired the skill with which it had been disguised by the decorative scheme, but were inclined to scoff at the previous searchers who had missed it.

A few minutes later they had uncovered the narrow passage and soon the 'up-to-date' dictograph, covered with sacking to shield it from the gaze of the passers-by, was carried to the van, followed by a carefully-packed case of cylindrical records.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE APPARATUS WAS SET up in Channing's own office and as the records had been carefully numbered Inspector Joliffe was able to begin playing them off in order. Channing, who had a good knowledge of German, listened to the first one, and promptly telephoned to M.I.5 asking for one of their representatives to be sent over.

By the time half of the records had been heard it was time for the Superintendent's interview with the Assistant-Commissioner. He suspended the sitting then and named an hour for the continuation. He did not appear to be as jubilant as Mr. Wigan had expected.

"What is wrong?" the ex-schoolmaster asked when the others had gone. "You don't appear to be pleased."

"Oh, I'm pleased all right," Channing replied, "but we're not out of the wood yet. We've heard a lot of stuff, interesting and otherwise, but there's a difficulty. How are we to identify the voices?"

"Well," Mr. Wigan told him, "as you have heard, some of them are identified by the fact that certain speakers address others by name. I have identified at least two voices myself."

"Which ones?" the Superintendent asked.

"The young fellow who was shot yesterday," Mr. Wigan replied, "and Mrs. Baumeister."

"Oh, yes, I recognized her voice, too," Channing said, "but there's another woman's voice there, too, and the curious thing is that it is familiar to me. I've heard it somewhere."

"Yes," Mr. Wigan confirmed, "I know the one you mean—the charming creature who said 'Zimmermann, you must do your Japanese magic on this man Stavrich,' and so on."

"That's her," Channing agreed. "I wish I knew where I'd heard it before."

"The trouble probably is," Mr. Wigan said, "that you've never heard her speak German before. It's not easy to identify a voice in different languages."

"No. Anyhow, it's perfectly clear that not only was Stavebrook murdered but Lady Cranhurst as well. Who'd have thought she was mixed up with that crowd?"

"We shall probably hear more about the whole business in the lot of records still to be played. Then I should like to have a talk with Mrs. Baumeister."

"Still harping on that?" the Superintendent said, picking up his papers. "I'll ask the A.C. about it. Come on. I'm kicking you out. I'm going to lock this door and have it guarded."

Five minutes later Channing entered the Assistant Commissioner's office.

"Well?" the latter greeted him. "How about it, Channing? Found any more mare's nests?"

Channing smiled.

"Yes," he replied, "with a good sitting of eggs in 'em."

"Ducks' eggs, probably," the Assistant Commissioner grumbled.

"Yes," the Superintendent retorted, "'Nippon Duck's' eggs, and they're not addled either."

"I don't know what the devil you're talking about," his chief said to this. "What's the position?"

Channing at once plunged into a recital of the story of



recent events. At the end the Assistant Commissioner shook his head.

"Seems a hell of a muddle to me," he said. "What's it all about? The Kilkenny cats weren't in it with these people. First they kill off the people who know too much, then they kill one another. Then this Jap sits in—ready to pick up their tails, I suppose. It doesn't make much sense to me."

"I think," Channing replied, "it's much simpler than it looks. The principle they go on would seem to be to kill off anybody who might talk."

"How does that apply to this Zimmermann fellow?" the Assistant Commissioner asked. "He seems, from what you have heard so far, to have been the one who was directly responsible for the killings before his own death, and entirely trustworthy from the point of view of the gang."

"We haven't heard anything yet from the Jap's records," Channing replied, "to throw any light on that, but I think his death can be explained in the same way. He rather put his foot in it by attacking that woman and drawing our attention to himself. They may have thought he had outlived his usefulness."

"Pretty grim!" was the Assistant Commissioner's comment.

"Yes," the Superintendent agreed, "but they're a grim crowd."

"I can't understand," his chief said then, "why you have let that little ex-schoolmaster fellow muddle about in the case so long."

"Do you really think he has been muddling?" Channing asked. "If you look at things fairly I think you'll find that practically every discovery we've made has been due to something he has done."

"M'yes, it does seem to be so," the other admitted, "and in any case he's been useful in this Japanese business. I'd like to know, however, what that Japanese proverb is all about. You say you discovered it marked in that book you found at Zimmermann's place. What's the significance of that? Then, again, why did this Jap colonel react so curiously to Wigan's showing it to him?"

"I don't know," Channing replied, "but I don't doubt Mr. Wigan will find that out too. The Jap is safely tied to his hospital bed for some time yet, and we can afford to wait. There's something else, however, he wants to do."

"What's that?"

"He wants to interview Mrs. Baumeister so that we can listen in."

"He does, eh? It's damned irregular, Channing. What would some of our Lib-Labour M.P.s say if they got wind of it? Questions in Parliament and what not."

"There's no reason why they should get wind of it," Channing replied.

"Isn't there?" the A.C. asked grimly. "There's a devil of a lot of talk goes on between some of our own fellows and these Socialists. Even the police are Bolshies nowadays."

"Not mine," Channing replied. "My men don't talk."

"Well," the A.C. decided, "I'll leave it in your hands. Let Wigan have his own way if you like, but I know nothing about it."

Channing smiled. This was exactly what he had expected.

"The main thing," the A.C. went on, "is to identify



all those voices and bring in their owners—especially that Herr Maier, who barks at them all. He seems to be the boss.”

“I don’t know about that,” Channing demurred. “He doesn’t bark nearly so much when that woman is there. Her word seems to be law, and even the major gives in to her.”

“Who is she?”

“I wish I knew,” the Superintendent replied, “but I’m almost sure I’ve heard her talking somewhere.”

“You’ll remember by and by,” the A.C. said. “However, all that is by the way. What I wanted to say about the whole business is this: All this how-d’ye-do began with some suspicious deaths. It was complicated later by this alleged spy business. Now, I know you and M.I.5 are keen on scotching any stuff of that kind, and I know, too, that it is very probable that by investigating your line of country you’re going to clear up the murder business at the same time. Nevertheless, Channing, I’d like to see a bit more progress made in the murder investigation properly speaking. Have you, for example, discovered how the devil all those people were induced to walk out of a window to their deaths? Everything goes to show that they weren’t pushed. They apparently walked out entirely of their own free will. How was it done? You know, a judge and jury will want to know that before any trial has been five minutes under way, and unless you tell them I don’t see much chance of a conviction.”

“I know all that, sir,” Channing replied, “and it worries me, too. Up to the present we don’t know how the job was done. I’m not sure, however, that Mr. Wigan hasn’t an idea in his head about it. He——”

"It's always Mr. Wigan," the Assistant Commissioner interrupted irritably. "Haven't we got any brains at all in the Department?"

Channing prudently did not answer this.

"However," the A.C. went on, "I suppose you'd better get back and listen to the rest of those records. They seem to be the only chance of learning anything."

The Superintendent was glad to go. He never considered these pow-wows with his chief to be of any practical value, and much preferred to be allowed to get on with an investigation without such interruptions.

He found Mr. Wigan hovering about the corridor outside his room.

"What?" he asked. "You still here, Mr. Wigan?"

"Yes," Mr. Wigan replied. "What did the Commissioner say about my interviewing Mrs. Baumeister?"

Channing laughed.

"Is that what's worrying you?" he asked. "Oh, you may see her, but we must first rig up a room."

Mr. Wigan nodded.

"I know," he said. "That can be done while we are listening to the remaining records."

"Indeed?" the Superintendent said, raising his eyebrows in pretended surprise. "So you've worked it all out ahead? Perhaps you've already put the job in hand?"

"Oh, no," Mr. Wigan replied. "I haven't presumed quite so far, but I did tell Inspector Joliffe that an installation might be needed."

"That was nice of you," Channing said dryly, "and when would you like to hear the remainder of these records?"

"Now."



"Now? What about the M.I.5 man? Have we got to put them all on again for him later?"

"Oh, no," Mr. Wigan said without the suspicion of a smile. "He will be here in a few minutes if we call him. I told him that there was quite a good canteen not far from here and advised him to try it in company with one of your young men."

Channing unlocked his door.

"There's nothing for it," he said, "but to do as you wish. Come in and call the canteen."

A few minutes later they had resumed the methodical playing through of the records following the order denoted by the numbers on the cylinders. All listened in silence until at a point where the voice which had puzzled Channing was speaking for perhaps a full minute.

Mr. Wigan sat up in his chair and reached over to the Superintendent's desk for a piece of paper. He scribbled a couple of words on this and pushed it over to Channing. The latter looked at it and his mouth fell open. Then he clamped his teeth together and hit his desk.

"Damn fool! Of course!" he exclaimed. Mr. Wigan raised his hand for silence.

"I missed that last sentence," he said calmly, "would you mind playing it over again, Inspector Joliffe?"

Joliffe obliged and the sitting proceeded as before for nearly half an hour, the only sound other than the recorded voices being the occasional scratch of the M.I.5 man's pen as he made a note. Suddenly Mr. Wigan sat up again. The conversation being played over at the time was in German, but neither Channing nor the Intelligence man seemed to find it particularly interesting. The ex-schoolmaster, however, listened carefully,



and instead of allowing a change of record at the end asked that the same one be played again.

"I should like to hear it again," he said, "and I want everybody to listen very carefully."

Channing nodded and Inspector Joliffe replayed the record.

It was a conversation between the mysterious woman who had dominated the actions of the gang and the man known as the 'Herr Major.' Parts of it were in a low voice, as though the speakers were sitting close to one another. The subject of their talk seemed to be some particular line of action to be followed with regard to their own people. There were names mentioned, all of which had already been noted both by Channing and the M.I.5 man. The phrase which interested Mr. Wigan, however, was one which was apparently of little interest to the others.

"Don't worry, *gnädige frau*," the major was saying; "if Yamasari himself could be eliminated by means of a dose of his own medicine, there will be no difficulty with anybody else."

Mr. Wigan wrote this down. The record came to an end.

"I don't see anything in that lot," Channing said, "of more importance than the others. In fact it was very dull. Nothing new, at any rate, and nothing startling."

"No!" Mr. Wigan said slowly, as if he were absent-mindedly talking to himself. "Nothing startling! Eliminated! Dose of his own medicine! No, no. Nothing startling. Still, Mr. Channing, I think we have heard enough for my interview with Mrs. Baumesiter—and the other lady as well!"

"Yes, by George," Channing exclaimed. "The other



lady! How did I miss that? I'd better have her pulled in at once."

"Don't do anything so utterly childish!" Mr. Wigan snapped with true pedagogic impatience.

"You're quite right, Mr. Wigan, you're quite right!" Channing replied with more than schoolboyish submission.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

MR. WIGAN'S INTERVIEW WITH Mrs. Baumeister took place in Channing's room where, to the ex-schoolmaster's surprise, a complete dictograph installation already existed. The woman was no longer full of the self-confidence she had shown during their previous meeting, nor was she so carefully groomed. The police had given her access to her luggage which they had taken from her hotel, but she had apparently lost interest in her personal appearance. She wore a tailor-made costume, but managed somehow to make that smart garment look dowdy.

She did not reply to Mr. Wigan's polite greeting when shown into the room, but she sat down in the chair indicated by him.

"Well, Mrs. Baumeister," Mr. Wigan said amiably, "I hope you do not object to this little interview I managed to arrange."

Mrs. Baumeister said nothing.

"Ah!" the ex-schoolmaster went on unabashed. "Silence is an admirable thing in women—and in men, too. It is so pleasant, however, when one comes to my age to be allowed to talk on and on without interruption, that I am afraid I am liable to be a little garrulous at times."

"You are a silly old ass!" Mrs. Baumeister suddenly spat at him.

Mr. Wigan, quite unperturbed, smiled at her.

"Perhaps," he said. "Many people have thought so."

Mrs. Baumeister seemed to regret her little outburst,



for she sat back again with set mouth as if determined not to be tempted into another.

"Yes," Mr. Wigan, seeing this, went on, "many people have thought me a silly old ass, and perhaps they were right, but you see, my dear lady, I have come to the conclusion that it doesn't matter. Silliness is, like everything else, purely relative. When there are other people even more silly, why, then, I am comparatively clever. What is it the French say? You know French, Mrs. Baumeister? Of course you do. Well, they say: '*Dans le royaume des aveugles le borgne est roi.*'"

As Mrs. Baumeister continued to sit in stony silence, Mr. Wigan meandered on.

"Yes," he continued, "in the kingdom of the blind the one-eyed man is king. I have just been studying the history of such a kingdom, and the results of my observations are interesting. For instance, when one reflects upon the state of affairs caused by a dishonest one-eyed king—or queen—one is really sorry for his—or her—blind subjects. The latter are so often led into awkward situations and left there to find their own way out while the one-eyed king—or queen—wriggles out alone."

At each reference to 'the queen' Mr. Wigan saw a gleam of some emotion or other pass in the eyes of the woman in front of him, but she still remained silent.

"Now, you, for example, Mrs. Baumeister," he went on, "are here—in an awkward situation, while another lady wriggles out. You may, of course, also wriggle out, but I shall be very sorry for you if you do. The other lady will, I am sure, never believe that you are not the strong silent woman you are proving yourself to be, and I'm afraid you will not be able to call me as a witness. You see, I know already everything that you could tell me."



This time Mrs. Baumeister laughed.

"That," she said then, "is a very old trick. I have——"  
She stopped.

Mr. Wigan nodded.

"I know," he said, "you have used it yourself. This time, however, I can assure you, it is not a trick."

"I am getting tired of you," the woman said. "If you think you can make me talk you are mistaken. I am not a paid hireling who bites the hand who feeds her."

Mr. Wigan laughed.

"No," he said. "Your bite is for others, I know."

"That is so," Mrs. Baumeister replied, "because I am the servant only of one person. I have one leader—one leader only."

"M'm! Yes," Mr. Wigan replied. "The word in German is Führer, is it not?"

"Yes."

"I see. Then all enemies of the Führer are your enemies?"

"Yes," was the vehement response. "All! The Russian Communist swine and all who help them. You English and the French and Czechs and——"

Mr. Wigan rose to his feet.

"In that case," he interrupted, with a bow, "I think you are right. I will not question you."

The woman stopped short and stared at him.

At that moment a woman police officer entered the room and Mr. Wigan went out.

In the next room he found the Superintendent who, with others, had been listening. Channing had the headphones still on his head.

"Why the devil did you stop short like that?" he stormed. "Dammit, man, you had her on the run."

"What do you mean?" Mr. Wigan asked. "On the



contrary, any further talk would have been futile. The woman is a fanatical Nazi. When she spoke of her Führer she was like a person worshipping, and her anti-Communist——"

"That's just the point," Channing wailed. "That's where you had her if you'd only used your——"

He stopped suddenly and looked at Mr. Wigan.

"Good Lord!" he said in a calmer tone then. "Is it possible? Look here, Mr. Wigan, do you ever read the daily papers?"

"Very seldom," Mr. Wigan replied. "I read the book pages of the *Sunday Times*, but the daily papers are very uninteresting. Now and then I read accounts of murders to see if there is anything interesting in them, but——"

"Don't you read the political news?" Channing asked.

"Politics bore me," Mr. Wigan said simply. "I hear all I want about them from the wireless talks on world affairs, but lately I don't seem to have had time to listen even to them."

Channing looked at the other occupants of the room. Then he turned to Mr. Wigan again.

"Then," he said, "you don't know that Hitler has actually sent von Ribbentrop to Moscow to sign a treaty with Stalin?"

"Impossible!" Mr. Wigan exclaimed. "What about the anti-Comintern pact?"

"Yes," Channing replied dryly. "What about it?"

He went over to a table and picked up a newspaper. He folded it in such a way that the first two columns were exposed.

"Look!" he said, handing the paper to Mr. Wigan. "Front-page news! Signature expected to-day!"

Mr. Wigan read the headlines and the first few lines



of the story "From our Moscow Correspondent." Then he handed back the paper.

"Yes," he said calmly. "It was stupid of me."

There was silence in the room for a minute.

"However," he resumed, "it does not make any difference. Mrs. Baumeister is such a fanatical follower of Hitler that everything he does is right."

"I wonder," Channing replied. "It struck me from her tone that her hatred of Communism is more of a religion even than her love of Hitler. What is more—from the way she talked, I doubt if she has read this bit of news."

"Then," Mr. Wigan said, brightening up, "the rest is easy. Why not let her read it now? Oh, you needn't call her attention to this particular item. Just leave a newspaper in her cell. She is not a convicted person, so there is nothing to prevent that."

Channing took the forgotten headphones from his head.

"We can try it," he said, "but I don't hope for much from it now. The psychological moment is gone."

He left the room with the newspaper, leaving Mr. Wigan with the men who had been listening to and writing down his conversation with Mrs. Baumeister. They were now preparing to go out while another man was stowing away the listening apparatus.

"I really must read the papers in future," Mr. Wigan said to nobody in particular.

"I should, sir," one of the men said. "They're interesting just now."

"Really? Why?"

"Well," the man replied, shrugging his shoulders, "it looks as if the pot was going to boil over soon."

"Pot? Boil over? What about?" Mr. Wigan asked.



The men looked at him pityingly.

"Over this Danzig question, of course," one of them said.

"Oh, yes. The Danzig question. Yes, that was bound to crop up sooner or later," Mr. Wigan said composedly. "There has always been the makings of a dispute there, of course."

"Dispute?" the man who was disconnecting headphones said over his shoulder. "I'll say! A dispute that'll end everything."

"What do you mean?" Mr. Wigan asked.

"I mean war," was the reply, "and it'll be a hell of a war, too."

"It will hardly affect us," Mr. Wigan declared. "What concern is it of ours?"

"Good Lord, sir," the man exclaimed. "You really *should* read your papers. Of course it's our concern. Haven't we guaranteed Poland's independence?"

"Have we?" Mr. Wigan asked vaguely. Oh, yes, I suppose we have. Then— Why, goodness gracious! We will most certainly be drawn into the quarrel."

The men looked at him in wonderment, as if they could hardly believe that such as he existed. Just then the Superintendent came back.

"Get those notes typed," he said to the men. "Tomorrow morning will do."

"Very good, sir," was the reply, and a moment later they had gone.

"Well, Mr. Wigan," Channing said then, "we have still a lot of work in front of us. At least, I have. You are probably tired."

Mr. Wigan was not listening.

"War!" he muttered. "How terrible! All those young fellows! Terrible!"

Channing looked at him.

"So you've tumbled to it?" he said brutally. "Yes, I'm afraid we're for it, but it won't be only the young 'uns. We old ones will feel it too. However, our work must go on. I've sent that newspaper down to your girl friend, and she can digest it at her ease."

He had hardly finished the sentence when there was an agitated knock at the door, followed by the entrance of the woman police officer who had escorted the prisoner a few minutes before. In her hands she held a newspaper torn and crumpled. She was panting.

"The woman is mad, sir," she declared. "She attacked me and tore the paper as soon as she read the beginning of the front page. She is still shouting like a maniac, and as far as I can make out she is accusing us of having had the paper specially printed to make her talk."

Channing nodded and then burst out laughing.

"I had an idea she wouldn't believe a word of it," he said, "but that's damn funny."

"I think it is very sad," Mr. Wigan said.

"Sad? Yes, I suppose it is," Channing agreed soberly, then.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

FOR SEVERAL DAYS MR. WIGAN did not go near Scotland House. He spent hours in a certain Public Library reading the back numbers of *The Times*, which were filed there. What he read brought home to him the narrowness of the existence he had chosen for himself and the folly—as he called it to himself—of neglecting wider interests in his devotion to one particular hobby.

Having posted himself thoroughly in world events he paid a visit to his friend the Superintendent, who greeted him quietly, asking no questions regarding his apparent abandonment of the investigation. It was Mr. Wigan himself who approached the subject first.

"I presume," he said, "that you have finished the case."

"The case? Life is one case after another," Channing replied. "You mean the 'Nippon Duck' case, I suppose. Yes, I think that's finished."

"Then you have arrested everybody concerned?"

"Oh, Lord, no!" the Superintendent told him, "but we've discovered the whereabouts of them all."

"I don't understand," the ex-schoolmaster declared. "Why leave them at liberty?"

"Because," Channing replied, "we want to find out more about them and their friends. You don't imagine, do you, that their organization is the only one working here?"

"No, perhaps not," Mr. Wigan agreed, "but surely it is not wise to allow people like that to go on working against this country?"

"Don't worry, Mr. Wigan," the Superintendent said with a smile, "they're not working very much at the moment. Perhaps they think they are, but there's very little to show for it. When we're ready we'll pick them up and put them away safely where they won't do any more harm."

"Put them away?" the ex-schoolmaster exclaimed. "Is that all? Oh, but surely some of them at any rate should be brought to trial and hanged!"

"Hanged? We don't hang spies. We shoot 'em, but only in war-time, and though it looks as if that isn't far off we're not at war yet, and I think internment will meet the case."

While the Superintendent was speaking Mr. Wigan's face expressed sheer bewilderment.

"I really don't understand, Mr. Channing," he said. "I was under the impression that we were investigating a case of murder—not merely espionage."

"Murder? Oh, yes, I suppose it is," Channing replied. "I had almost forgotten that."

"Surely it was murder which——"

"I wasn't particularly interested in the murders as such," the Superintendent interrupted. "What I am after is the espionage end of it. The rest is not really my affair."

"Then," Mr. Wigan declared with more firmness than he had yet shown, "I shall have to make it my affair. Murder must not go unpunished."

"Them's my sentiments, too," Channing agreed, "but I'm far too busy with my own work to go in for a murder investigation. Between you and me and the gatepost war is only a matter of weeks, perhaps days, and that's going to keep me occupied quite enough. In any case, once we've got all those Jerries under lock and key the



inquiry into any murders they may have committed can go on quietly without any fuss."

"And clues will have been lost," Mr. Wigan added.

"Perhaps," Channing said composedly, "but I can't help that."

"Mr. Channing," the ex-schoolmaster stated seriously, "I have not been idle during the past few days. I have been reading the papers."

"No!" Channing exclaimed with a smile. "Not really!"

"You may well mock me," Mr. Wigan said. "I deserve it. However, I have tried to remedy my neglect, and I have come to the conclusion that Hitler and his gang are unscrupulous to the last degree."

"You're not alone in that," Channing murmured.

Mr. Wigan ignored the remark.

"Yes," he went on, "by their actions they are proving it. In order to ensure allies for themselves they invented this anti-Comintern pact. Then, as we have seen, they use one of those allies, Japan, as a scapegoat. Now they are signing an alliance with Communism, thus betraying both Italy and Japan, and demonstrating to the world that their support of General Franco was a mockery. They——"

"Yes, yes," the Superintendent interrupted a trifle impatiently. "I know all that, but what are you leading up to, Mr. Wigan?"

"Merely this," Mr. Wigan replied, "the Germans will use any instrument and any means—including murder—to secure their ends. They will then discard those instruments when they are no longer indispensable. We have seen that they do not hesitate to kill even their own people to prevent them from talking. Would it not be better to arrest these people now with a double object



in view, namely to stop this almost wholesale murder and to persuade one or other of them to talk?"

"The trouble is," Channing explained, "that we have little or no proof against any of them which would justify an arrest. As for making any of them talk—well, you saw how we succeeded in the case of Mrs. Baumeister. She, by the way, still doesn't believe that her beloved Führer is allying himself with Stalin."

Mr. Wigan rose.

"I see I cannot convince you," he said. "You and I are looking at this business from entirely different angles. I see in it a case of murder pure and simple; you see only a case which requires the attention of the Special Branch."

"That's not quite a fair picture of my side of it," Channing demurred. "I see in it part—only part, mind you—of a plot against the safety of this Realm, and that with all due respect to you, Mr. Wigan, is far more important than a couple of tin-pot murders."

"Tin-pot murders!" Mr. Wigan echoed with horror. "To think that you—a policeman—should think so little of human life!"

"I think a whole lot of human life," Channing declared, "because I can see ahead of us what we—both of us—have already seen twenty years ago—ten million murders. What are two or three—yes, tin-pot murders in comparison with that? But we're getting nowhere, talking like this. Sit down, Mr. Wigan, and let's get down to brass tacks."

Mr. Wigan resumed his seat.

"Now," the Superintendent resumed, "let me ask you a couple of questions."

Mr. Wigan nodded.



"First of all," Channing asked, "have we any definite proof that Stavebrook's death and the other two were really murder?"

"Perhaps not *definite* proof," Mr. Wigan replied, "but there is strong presumptive evidence that they were."

"All right," the Superintendent went on. "Now, have we any evidence against any individual which would convince a jury that he—or she—was responsible for such murders?"

"I think so," the ex-schoolmaster declared. "We have the Japanese colonel's diary and the records made by him at the 'Nippon Duck,' which would surely convince anybody."

"I should read that diary again if I were you," Channing advised, "and listen to those records again. I have read your translation and listened at least ten times to the records, and though I agree that the evidence in them does point to one person I can't yet see how the murders were committed. Put yourself in the position of defending counsel, Mr. Wigan, and you will realize how easy it would be to laugh our case out of court. In the first place there is perfectly reliable and unbiased evidence that Stavebrook and the others actually walked to their deaths deliberately."

Mr. Wigan seemed about to protest, but he sat back again and allowed the Superintendent to continue.

"If you were to put forward the idea, say, of hypnotic suggestion, you would expose the prosecution to ridicule, and your whole case would crumble away. You see, we have absolutely no proof that any one of the people we are both thinking about was within miles of any one of the dead men on the days of their deaths."

"Supposing all that to be the case," Mr. Wigan asked.



"What conclusion do you draw? That the whole murder investigation be dropped?"

"A murder investigation is never dropped," Channing replied. "I only say this, that it is necessary in the interests of a wider policy that these people should go apparently unpunished. We frankly have not time or staff enough to go into the murders as we could and would do in other circumstances. Therefore, we must simply keep our eyes open and pounce on all these people immediately war is declared."

Mr. Wigan said nothing for some moments.

"Would there be any objection," he asked then, "to my continuing my inquiries independently?"

"That depends," Channing replied. "We can't have you alarming those people. They are at the moment convinced, I think, that they have given us the slip, and if you are discovered by them snooping around they'll take cover like a lot of corncrakes. Then, again, there's your own personal safety. We——"

Mr. Wigan waved that away.

"My personal safety is a detail we need not discuss," he said. "I see your point about not alarming the gang, but what I had in mind was investigating the method of murder—not the murderers themselves. I think I could do that without arousing suspicion."

Channing shook his head doubtfully.

"M'm! I don't know," he said. "It sounds risky to me. Risky from my point of view as well as yours. However, I won't say 'no' out of hand, but I'd like to know more about how you're going to set about the job. Where would you start?"

"Well," Mr. Wigan replied. "I had thought of going and having a talk with the Japanese colonel, if he is allowed to receive visitors."



"Oh, yes, he is getting on quite well," the Superintendent said, "but I can't imagine what he could tell you that we don't already know."

"I am interested," the schoolmaster stated, "in that Japanese scientist who fell under a car in Berlin."

"What the— Come in!"

The interruption was a knock at the door. A messenger entered.

"There's a man out there, sir," he announced, "who insists on seeing you. He is a foreigner by the name of Starfish or something, and he just won't leave till you see him. He has some sort of parcel with him. Says he'll give it to you and nobody else."

"Starfish?" Channing repeated. "Oh, yes, I've got it. All right, I'll see him. Where is he?"

"In the lobby," the man replied. "Moore is keeping an eye on him."

"I'll go and have a word with him," the Superintendent said. "Excuse me, Mr. Wigan, I won't be long."

Mr. Wigan, who had obviously expected to be present at the interview, looked disappointed as he was left alone in the room, but he resigned himself to await Channing's return. This was not long delayed, for a few minutes later the Superintendent came back as though in a hurry.

"I think," he said, "we've found the method you were going to look for."

He undid the untidy brown paper parcel he was carrying.

"Have you ever seen a contraption like this?" he asked.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

**W**HAT ON EARTH IS that?" Mr. Wigan asked. "It looks to me like one of those ready-made concertina trellis-work things one sees in suburban gardens."

"It's trellis-work all right," Channing replied grimly. "Look!"

He caught hold of two handles at one end of the flattish metal apparatus and, using both hands, he pressed them towards each other. Immediately a long zigzag-shaped affair, just like a narrow trellis, shot out towards Mr. Wigan, causing him to shrink back in his chair.

"I don't understand," the ex-schoolmaster said. "What has an expanding trellis got to do with what we have been talking about? I can't see how a thing like an exaggerated toasting fork can be——"

"Yes, yes," Channing interrupted. "That's right. It is like one of those gadgets you mention. Same principle as the door of a lift."

"I know," Mr. Wigan replied testily, "the principle is a very simple one, but will you please tell me what that thing like the back of a chair is?"

The thing referred to by Mr. Wigan was separate from the rest of the parcel.

"That's part of it," Channing said. "Look! it has a groove at the back. The ends fit in there."

He demonstrated how the almost semicircular band, like the back of a bentwood chair, could be attached, and he now sat with the complete apparatus in his two hands.



"I am still at a loss," Mr. Wigan declared. "It can't be for an extending telephone or——"

"Come over here," the Superintendent ordered, "and I'll show you something."

Mr. Wigan rose and went over.

"Now turn your back," Channing said.

Mr. Wigan obeyed, and the Superintendent fitted the semicircular end into the small of his back.

"Now, walk straight ahead slowly," was the next order.

Again Mr. Wigan obeyed, and at once found that he was being propelled along at a faster rate than that at which he had begun to walk. He looked behind and saw that Channing, pressing hard on the two handles, had again made the trellis-work expand, thus pushing him on. He twisted aside and stared at the thing which Channing had called a 'contraption.'

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed. "Do you mean to tell me that this was used to push a man through a window and to give the impression that he was walking freely?"

"Mr. Starfish—I mean Stavrich—Stavebrook's brother, is convinced of it," Channing replied.

"How does he know?"

"I couldn't say yet," the Superintendent said. "I left him making a statement to one of my lads."

"Where did he find this?" Mr. Wigan asked.

"From what I gathered just now," was the reply, "he found it in the luggage boot of a car. They're tracing the number now."

Mr. Wigan examined the expanding trellis again. It was, he saw, made of aluminium, painted over a dark reddish brown. He worked the handles as he had seen Channing do. Then he looked at the Superintendent.



"It is difficult to imagine," he said, "how anybody could be persuaded to allow himself to be propelled by this into empty space through a window, or even off an unrailed balcony. If he were already unconscious this thing would not keep him erect. If he were conscious there would be a struggle. Yet the evidence in every case is that the men walked deliberately out. If this contrivance were pushing them it explains only one thing, namely, the fact that nobody was seen actually behind them."

"What about a hypnotic drug?" Channing asked. "Something which would make a man do a sleep-walking act?"

"You, yourself, laughed at the idea a moment ago," Mr. Wigan retorted, "and yet I cannot see what other explanation can be found. I dare say there is in existence some such drug, but then why go to all the trouble this would seem to entail. Why not simply administer the hypnotic and leave the subject to commit suicide without any help? This thing, if employed as you suggest, is an over-elaboration."

"Or just an extra precaution," Channing added, "to ensure the desired result. Besides, I either heard or read somewhere that a man, even when under the influence of hypnosis, can't be persuaded to do anything repugnant to nature, such as deliberately drown himself for example."

"Yes, I believe that is so," Mr. Wigan agreed, "but I am not so sure about a drug. I am sure, for instance, that in certain stages of drunkenness a man can be made to do the most extraordinary things. There was a case some years ago of a man somewhere in one of the south coast towns, who thought while drunk that he could stop an express train by pulling on the last coach. He tried



it and was dragged along the track for fifty yards before he came to the conclusion that he was mistaken. When he came to his senses in hospital the next day he remembered nothing about it."

Channing smiled and nodded.

"Yes," he agreed, "that's possible. The only difficulty about this drug business is that there was no trace of anything of the kind in the bodies."

"How do you know?" Mr. Wigan asked. "Did anybody look for anything of the kind?"

"Yes, of course," Channing replied, "it is done automatically when there is a post-mortem. The question of alcohol must be taken into account, or the possibility of death having occurred, say, before the fall. Oh, yes, the bodies were examined for that sort of thing, but nothing was found."

"I must go and see Croker again," Mr. Wigan said after a pause. "He promised to let me know."

Channing stared at him.

"You what? Eh?" he asked.

"Oh, sorry," Mr. Wigan apologized. "I was thinking aloud. You see, I have an old friend who is a physician. Not long ago he told me about a Japanese scientist—Yamasari was the name, I think—who claimed to have produced a substance which was a combination of anæsthetic and drug predisposing to hypnosis. The curious thing is that Yamasari himself was killed by a motor-coach in Berlin."

Channing sat up.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed. "I want to hear more about that. Why didn't you mention it before? A Japanese—a drug—Berlin—killed—hang it, man, that may be the very thing we're looking for."

"There is really nothing more to tell," Mr. Wigan

replied. "I must go and see my friend again. He promised to make enquiries."

"Yes, go and see him," Channing urged. "If you don't hurry it may be too late."

"Why? I thought you were in no hurry," Mr. Wigan protested, apparently out of sheer contrariness.

Channing smiled.

"Why?" he repeated. "Simply because in the very near future it will be impossible to get any information whatever from Berlin. It's difficult enough even now. Oh, yes, I know I said that I was content with shutting these people up for the duration of a war, but I don't mind admitting that it would be a lot more satisfactory if we could bury some of them in lime."

"You have a horrible way of putting things," Mr. Wigan said with a grimace. "However, I shall certainly go and see my friend Croker."

"Do," the Superintendent counselled, "and when you've had your talk with him I'll see if your other friend Colonel Matsugoro—or Nakimura—can be allowed to see you. He may be able to give us some more information, especially if he knows of the Russo-German alliance."

"Very good," Mr. Wigan replied. "I shall go at once."

A few moments later he was walking along the Embankment. Two men on the other side of the road saw him as he hurried along.

"Look," said one to the other "that fair-haired bloke is following him. You stick to the old boy, I'll take on the other."

"No need," the other replied. "See who's following the fair-haired bloke? That's Collins of the Special Branch. He won't lose him."



So the procession went on its way, Mr. Wigan blissfully unaware that he was being followed, while his fair-haired trailer also knew nothing of the existence of the police officers who preceded and dogged him in turn.

The ex-schoolmaster reached his destination without being molested. He found Dr. Croker at home.

"Hello, Wiggy," the physician greeted him. "Sit down and have a drink."

Mr. Wigan accepted one invitation and declined the other.

"I've come, Croker," he said, "to find out if you know any more about that Japanese scientist who claimed to have——"

"I know," Croker interrupted. "Yamasari. I was going to ask you to come along. Curiously enough, I got a letter this morning from a friend of mine in Berlin—one of the few Jew doctors left. I wrote asking about Yamasari and his alleged discovery. It's a curious business."

"In what way?" Mr. Wigan asked.

"Well," the physician replied, "as I think I told you, Yamasari had the reputation of being an honest scientist—a man who would never announce a result or make a claim until he had checked and counterchecked it. So, when he made this announcement at the beginning of the year, every other scientist in the world accepted it without question. Now, the funny thing about the whole business is that since his death—you remember he was killed in a street accident—not a trace of this new substance has been found, nor is there a single note about his experiments among the papers he left. The result is that people are saying now that there never was such



a drug or that he had made premature claims for it, and it is being hinted that he deliberately walked in front of the motor-bus which killed him because he couldn't stand the inevitable discovery. My friend says, however, that nobody connected with the Embassy believes that."

"What do they believe?" Mr. Wigan asked.

"My friend doesn't say," Croker replied, "but reading between the lines I'd say that they think there has been some dirty work at the cross-roads."

Mr. Wigan nodded several times.

"But, look here, Wiggy," the doctor went on. "What is this all about? Let me in on it."

"Later," Mr. Wigan replied. "I don't think I can now. You have, however, I think, helped me enormously."

"All right! I'll hold you to that," Croker said, "and if you don't keep your promise I'll invent some hypnotic drug to make you talk, and put it in your whisky—only you don't drink. Never mind, I'll jab a hypodermic into you like the novelists do. I wish they'd try giving an injection to an unwilling patient."

"Oh," Mr. Wigan said suddenly, "by the way, do you happen to know whether this drug of Yamasari's was to be administered internally or subcutaneously?"

"Do you read German?" Croker asked.

"Yes."

The doctor took from his desk an envelope and extracted from the latter a sheet of paper—obviously a page from a periodical of some kind.

"I'm not very good at it," he said, "but from this, which my Jew friend in Berlin enclosed with his letter, I gather that it was given internally."



Mr. Wigan took the paper and ran his eye quickly down the page.

"Yes," he answered, "it was given internally. May I keep this for a few days?"

"Yes," Croker replied, "but give it to me back when you've finished with it."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

**M**R. WIGAN, WATCHED BY four other men, went towards Oxford Street and entered the first telephone booth he saw. He found Channing in his room.

"I have seen Dr. Croker," he announced. "Now can I see Colonel Matsugoro?"

"Not so fast, Mr. Wigan," the Superintendent said. "I want to hear what your friend said, and I don't want to hear it over the telephone. So come along here. I shall be in my room for another hour."

The ex-schoolmaster obeyed the injunction. For a few moments he gave heart palpitations to his trailers by apparently looking about for a taxi; whether because he did not see one or for some other reason he chose the Underground. It was characteristic of the man that he did not pay any attention either to the conversation of his neighbours or to the fact, obvious to others, that something serious was afoot. The posters in the hands of the newsvendors at the Tube station entrances might not have existed.

When he arrived at Scotland House he found Channing signing rapidly one paper after another as each was placed in front him by a man in plain clothes. The Superintendent merely nodded and indicated a chair. Mr. Wigan waited until the sheaf of signed papers had been taken away.

"Well?" Channing said then, in an official tone with which the ex-schoolmaster was quite unfamiliar. It produced its effect, however, and he told the Superintendent with equal crispness what he had heard.



Channing nodded.

"There may be something there," he said. "I have asked about your Japanese colonel. You can see him, and you'd better see him at once."

"What? Now?" Mr. Wigan exclaimed. "It is very late and I thought of having something to eat."

"Please yourself," the Superintendent said, "but if you don't see him to-day I don't know when I can arrange it. This case will interest me only incidentally, as from to-morrow I shall be too busy after that."

"Really?" Mr. Wigan exclaimed. "May I ask why?"

Channing looked at the older man with a smile which was not all amusement.

"Mr. Wigan," he said, "you've just seen me sign a heap of papers. Those papers have been awaiting signature for the past month or thereabouts. Among them are some which concern everybody we know of in this gang of German spies. They will all be arrested within the next twenty-four hours unless I'm very much mistaken. It may depend on you—for I haven't time—whether they are arrested as murderers or simply as enemies, actual or potential, of the State."

"You mean," Mr. Wigan asked, "that war is as near as that?"

"Keep on reading your papers, Mr. Wigan," the Superintendent said, "or listen to the wireless."

"I should like to talk with Colonel Matsugoro as soon as possible," Mr. Wigan said simply.

"Good!"

Channing took a sheet of paper from his desk and handed it over.

"You know where he is," he said. "This will let you in to him."

Three minutes later the ex-schoolmaster was on his way.

He found the Japanese sitting up in bed, apparently in the best of health, playing dominoes with a policeman. The latter remained during the interview, of which he understood not a word, for it was conducted in Japanese. He noted, however, that after the first three minutes the patient appeared to get excited, then that he calmed down and spoke lengthily, that as he spoke the visitor became excited in his turn, and finally that the ex-schoolmaster ran out of the room as if pursued by somebody.

In the street, Mr. Wigan headed at once for a taxi rank, but before he had gone half a dozen steps a man called out behind him.

"Mr. Wigan!"

Mr. Wigan turned.

"The Superintendent," the man announced, "has sent a car for you in case you wish to see him in a hurry."

"I do, indeed," Mr. Wigan replied. "I must see him at once."

With a hand on his arm the man directed him across the street to a large car which stood there. A moment later the door closed behind him.

"Good evening, Mr. Wigan," a voice in the back of the car greeted him—a voice which was familiar to him.

"Oh!" Mr. Wigan exclaimed in surprise, and then swiftly recovering himself. "Yes, that was very stupid of me. I presume that I shall be the next to walk out of a window. Well! Well!"

"Yes, you vill valk somewhere you do not vish!" a man sitting beside the driver said with a guttural laugh.

"Dear me!" Mr. Wigan said calmly. "This is an



honour! The lady chief and the Herr Maior in person to escort me! I am flattered."

"Shut up!" his neighbour—the man who had decoyed him to the car—snapped, and struck.

Mr. Wigan, after a split second of intolerable pain, slid into unconsciousness.

On the pavement two men looked at each other in consternation.

"Good Lord!" said one. "We've lost him. Get a taxi."

"Too late," the other replied. "Better report to the Yard."

"Look!" the first speaker said. "That's one of our cars, and that's Collins in it. He's after them! Where's the nearest phone?"

A few minutes sufficed for Channing to be informed of what had happened.

He seemed to accept the news with indifference. He replaced the telephone receiver and then lifted it again to call a number.

"Have the cars ready," he said then. "Six men."

Then he sat back in his chair and waited. He had not been waiting long when a man in plain clothes came in.

"No word yet, sir," he announced.

"No," Channing replied, "but if Collins is after them it's all right."

"Yes," the other agreed, "but it's strange that there's no word from Mrs. Bowman."

"She's probably after them, too," the Superintendent declared. "Don't worry, Cranshaw."

"I hope so," Inspector Cranshaw said, "but she's dead beat. She's had no rest for a week. She's stayed up half the night all the way through. We'll need her evidence

to sew the thing up. I hope they haven't tumbled to her."

Channing shrugged his shoulders.

"I hope they don't hurt that poor little ex-school-master," he said. "He's been very useful."

"Useful? How, sir?" the inspector asked. "He hasn't helped much in the main matter."

Channing laughed shortly.

"His idea and ours," he said, "of what the main matter is are very different, but he has been very useful, nevertheless, in drawing the attention of the spy crowd away from ourselves. Besides, he has helped in other ways as well. He has discovered a thing or two on his own."

"Well," the inspector commented, "evidently the gang think so, or they wouldn't have bothered with him."

"Precisely," the Superintendent agreed, "and I think he must have got something out of that Japanese. That fellow Stavrich nearly spoiled everything, though, by his snooping around. We're lucky they didn't spot him."

"Very. The f——"

The telephone bell interrupted the sentence. Channing lifted the receiver, listened and then put it down again.

"Just as I thought," he said. "Wandsworth. Come on."

He opened a drawer and took out a revolver.

"I think this is justified," he said.

"I've got mine," the inspector replied, and followed his chief down to the waiting cars, in which six burly men, as well as the drivers, were already seated.

Channing went to each of the cars and gave the occupants identical instructions.



"It's the Wandsworth address," he said. "You know what you have to do. Look out for the little ex-school-master and keep him out of mischief."

"Yes, sir."

They moved off then and the journey was made in silence.

At a street corner one of the cars stopped and the men in it got out and scattered. The other car moved to the next corner, and the same manoeuvre was repeated.

"You keep by me, Cranshaw," Channing directed.

It was impossible even for a watcher to discover that the six men who were moving in apparently different directions were connected one with another. Channing and Cranshaw might have been suburban dwellers returning from a late day in the City. They walked quietly along the street and stopped in front of a fairly large house, the blinds of which were not drawn, and through the open French window of which could be seen a party of four people playing bridge, while a man and woman looked on. The two officers, however, were not interested in this quiet scene. It was to the house on the other side of the street that their attention was directed. That house was in darkness except for a dim light which shone out through the fanlight over the front door.

They stood still in the shadow of a tree waiting. Suddenly a scream from the house behind them rent the air. Involuntarily Channing turned to see what was happening. The woman who had been watching the bridge game was now at the window looking out and upwards.

"Look!" she screamed again, pointing this time. "He'll kill himself."



"Good God, sir!" Cranshaw exclaimed. "It's the ex-schoolmaster."

Channing looked at the house opposite. A large window on the second floor was wide open and he saw Mr. Wigan walking with slow steady steps towards it. There was no sign of anybody else in the room. He groaned.

"They've got him!" he said, and ran across the road. Suddenly he stopped.

"Good God!" he exclaimed.

Mr. Wigan had suddenly thrown himself to one side, and he could be seen plainly a second later struggling violently with someone who had evidently been crouching below him on the floor.

"Come on!" Channing shouted then, while Cranshaw gave three short blasts on his whistle.

The Superintendent was the first to enter the front door, which opened as he turned the handle. Closely followed by Cranshaw and another man who had appeared out of the darkness, he dashed up the stairs. Other men were running, too, but towards various rooms. The Superintendent went up to the second floor. Almost in front of the staircase the door of a lighted room stood open, and he saw a scene which he never forgot. Mr. Wigan was lying on his back on the floor, while a fair-haired man straddled him and was determinedly throttling him. To one side two women—one yelling and the other silent, neither of them young—were struggling furiously. They were all too busy to notice the new arrivals.

Channing ran forward and, taking his time, hit the fair-haired man carefully and accurately on the temple with the barrel of his revolver. Cranshaw went to the help of the elderly woman.



Mr. Wigan, panting and half choked, crept from under his assailant.

"Thank you, Mr. Channing," he croaked.

The other struggle was still going on. Channing stood for a second and watched it. Then, muttering to himself, he chose his moment, and for the second time brought his revolver down on a human head.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

WAR HAD BEEN DECLARED for several days before Mr. Wigan saw Channing again. Then one day the Superintendent rang him up in his repaired and newly-decorated rooms.

"I'm coming round to see you," he announced, and rang off at once.

Not many minutes later he arrived.

"Well, Mr. Wigan," he said, "how do you feel now?"

"Remarkably well, Mr. Channing," the little man replied cheerfully.

"I congratulate you," the Superintendent said. "Many a man would have been in bed after what you've been through."

"I have been through nothing worth mentioning," the ex-schoolmaster declared with a touch of wounded pride. "I would have you know that I am not exactly decrepit yet."

"No, you are certainly not that," Channing said heartily, "but, gosh, you did give me a scare the other evening. When I saw you walking the plank like that, I——"

"Yes," Mr. Wigan interrupted hastily, "that must have been a curious sight. If it hadn't been for Mrs. Bowman I should have followed Stavebrook and the others."

"Quite," the Superintendent said. "As a matter of fact I've come to get your statement regarding what happened from the moment you left the hospital."

"That will be a very short statement," Mr. Wigan laughed, "because I know very little of what happened."



When I was decoyed into that car I must have received a blow which knocked me unconscious, because I remember nothing until I found myself alone in a bedroom with an aching head. A few minutes after I came to, an elderly woman, who told me later that her name was Bowman, opened the door and crept into the room. She whispered to me that she was one of your people and told me to do everything my captors ordered me up to the limit of impossibility. What puzzled me, however, was her statement that if I were given a drink it would be powerless, but that I should pretend to be under its influence."

"The reason for that was very simple," Channing said. "She had found the drug, and had substituted coloured water for it. Clever woman, Jane Bowman."

"She was very nearly a dead one," Mr. Wigan declared, "for she was still in my room when the Herr Maier came in. Fortunately she had time to get into a cupboard. The Herr Maier was very polite. He apologized for the necessity of knocking me out, and sympathized with me on account of the headache he had caused. Then his lady boss came in. She was less polite. In fact, she called me some extremely opprobrious names. The Herr Maier then offered me a drink which he said would remove my headache. I made a show of being distrustful, but I drank it. I was rather at a loss then, because I had no idea of what the effect of the potion was supposed to be. I contented myself, therefore, with doing nothing. I did not speak, nor did I move. Those two stood watching me. Apparently I did the right thing, for after a little the Herr Maier began to talk to me in a quiet soothing voice, telling me how much good the drink was going to do to my head. Strangely enough, the headache did disappear, and I



began to wonder whether Mrs. Bowman was not a member of the gang. However, in about ten minutes I was evidently supposed to be ready, and I was invited to get up. I obeyed at once, and was told that they were going to take me to a more comfortable room. I just nodded in what I thought was the appropriate way, and went with them to that room where you found me. There I found a most curious arrangement, which you must have seen."

"Yes, I saw it," Channing replied, "though you had upset it. What I would like to know, though, is how they got their victims to mount those kitchen steps on to the plank."

"In my case," Mr. Wigan told him, "it was very simple. I was led to the steps by the woman and told to go up three treads and I would find my room ten paces ahead of the top of the stairs. As I got to the top step, the Herr Maier crouched near the window and pulled the curtains back. The window was wide open as you know, and the far end of the plank was on the sill. I felt somebody piloting me from behind, as if I were being held round the back ribs by two hands. There was no pushing—just a steady pressure, which kept me straight on the plank. I must say that I was frightened then. However, I walked slowly on and saw out of the tail of my eye that the woman was also crouched on the floor a bit behind and to the left of me, directing me with a contrivance she held in both hands. It was obviously a simliar thing to the one you showed me."

"It was identical," Channing said, "but what happened then?"

"Why, you saw what happened then," Mr. Wigan replied. "I walked along the plank until I almost reached the window. In fact I had only one more step to take



to walk out into space, when I wriggled to one side and jumped on to the Herr Maior, who was crouching there. I took him completely by surprise, but he was a stronger and younger man than I am, and things might have gone badly with me if you had not come. Mrs. Bowman had evidently been on the watch, too, because I caught sight of her fighting with the other woman."

Channing laughed.

"Fighting?" he said. "I wish you could have been in my place, Mr. Wigan, when I came in to that room. It was like a mad dream. Two pairs of you lying on the floor trying to kill each other!"

"At the time," Mr. Wigan replied dryly, "I was hardly in a position to appreciate the humour of the situation."

"No, I suppose not," Channing agreed. "However, I should be very glad, Mr. Wigan, if you would write out a statement giving the facts you have just told me."

"Yes, I can easily do that," the ex-schoolmaster replied, "though I don't know why you need it. The declaration of war has made it hardly necessary."

"How do you make that out?" Channing asked. "What has the declaration of war to do with a case of murder? We may be killing people wholesale in a war, but the police can't have murder in the streets of London, you know."

"That is true, I suppose," Mr. Wigan agreed, "though it's a curious commentary on the state of the world."

"It may be," Channing declared, "but a policeman doesn't worry about that. These people we have roped in are spies—or, at any rate, enemy agents—but we are going to treat some of them as murderers pure and simple. They will be tried for that and nothing else."

"Quite so!" Mr. Wigan said. "A hanged murderer is



a spy well disposed of. The dead have no mouths to report the——”

“Oh!” the Superintendent interrupted, “that’s another thing I wanted to ask you. What happened at your interview with the Japanese colonel? And what is the real significance of that business about the dead having no mouths?”

“At my interview with the colonel,” Mr. Wigan declared, “I took upon myself to tell him all about my suspicions and theories regarding the doings of this German spy organization. I think I was able to convince the Japanese that not only was he being used by the Germans—which he knew already—but that in case of danger he would be saddled with their crimes. I told him about the use to which the proverb was being put by having a copy of it placed in murdered men’s pockets. That made him indignant, and he told me all about it. The proverb is the password of a certain Japanese military secret society which was formed to combat the abuses of the civilian politicians who, in the army’s opinion, were ruining the army. Our colonel belonged to that society, and obviously the fact was discovered while he was in Berlin.

“Having told him of how the password was being employed, I found it quite easy to convince the colonel that Germany, by entering into an alliance with the Soviets, was betraying Japan and the other signatories of the anti-Comintern pact. It was then that he told me the actual names of the members of the organization who used the room at the ‘Nippon Duck,’ and, what was more, the name and address of the real chief. I was coming to tell you that when I was decoyed away, but obviously you already knew all about it, since you turned up in time to save my life.”



"Yes," Channing told him, "I recognized the voice after a lot of trying and failing to remember where I had heard it."

"Was her husband in it, too?" Mr. Wigan asked.

"No, the poor devil is terribly cut up about it all. He never knew that his wife was anything but a patriotic Polish woman who was anxious to help her fellow-countrymen. Actually, she was born in Poznan and spoke Polish fluently, but she was a fanatical Nazi, and as such has been very useful to the Germans here. She was just what they wanted—ruthless and unscrupulous. The only thing I don't know is how she managed to get hold of that drug."

"I think the Japanese colonel can help you there," Mr. Wigan said, "for when I told him about the way in which Stavebrook and the others were killed he got very excited and told me that he was convinced that the professor who had invented the drug had been murdered in Berlin in order to obtain the formula."

"I don't know about the formula," Channing said. "It defeats our research people so far, but it certainly does the trick. One of my boys, a hefty big P.C., volunteered to let himself be experimented on, and it was really a scream to see how he did everything he was told. He jibbed, however, when we tried to get him to walk out of a window. Then, in another room, we persuaded him that he was going through the door of a picture-house, and he walked straight through. It was on the ground floor and we caught him on a mattress. The effects of the drug seem to last about a day. He slept them off just like a drunk does, but he didn't remember a thing that had happened to him."

"I hope the formula is lost," Mr. Wigan declared. "I



feel inclined, however, to suggest that some of the stuff be used on Mrs. Richardson."

"What for?" Channing asked.

"It must be obvious," Mr. Wigan replied, "that she, as head of an organization under cover of being a Polish boarding-house keeper, must have been heavily financed by Berlin, and was certainly in the confidence of those higher up. She, therefore, must know the methods employed to get agents here under the cover of Jewish refugees, Poles, Czechs and what not. She may even know the names of several of them working here now. If we could give her a dose of this drug she might be able to tell us a lot, for if it can make a person do things it must also be capable of making them tell things."

Channing shook his head.

"Mrs. Richardson will stand her trial for murder," he said, "and until she does we can't do anything like that."

Mr. Wigan sat upright in his chair.

"You think that, do you?" he said. "Well, I don't, and I am going to use any influence I may have to see that this war against spies is not fought with kid gloves. I, for one, will be as ruthless as I can be."

"You?" Channing exclaimed.

"Yes, I!" Mr. Wigan declared. "I have been accepted in the Officers' Emergency Reserve for service in a certain department, and much as I should hate to deprive you of valuable help, I have applied for Mrs. Jane Bowman as my assistant. Believe me, Mr. Channing, that neither she nor I will ever forget that 'The Dead Have No Mouths.'"

THE END



# HURST & BLACKETT

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